

# The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



## BUFFALO BILL'S THUNDERBOLT

OR  
PAWNEE BILL AND THE  
BUFFALO-KILLERS

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"BUFFALO BILL"



STREET & SMITH,  
PUBLISHERS,  
NEW YORK.

A band of buffalo-killing Sioux tore past the concealed scouts  
and went flying toward the plain.



# THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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# BUFFALO BILL'S THUNDERBOLT;

OR,

## Pawnee Bill and the Buffalo Killers.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

### CHAPTER I.

#### A SUSPICIOUS CARGO.

The negro paddling downstream in a canoe, which towed a heavily laden raft, dipped his paddle deeper and sent forth a halloo when he sighted the cabin.

A heavily bearded white man appeared in answer to his hail, coming round the end of the cabin next the river.

The negro stood up, balanced himself, and waved the paddle.

"Wah-hoo!" he squawled. "I is sho' glad to see you."

He dug the paddle deep again, still standing up, and drove the canoe toward the bank just above the cabin. When he reached it the white man was there to catch the prow and hold the canoe steady.

"You're plum' ahead o' time," said the white man, pleased. "I didn't look fer you to git hyar till after to-mor'. Must 'a' had a good v'yage."

"I'd 'a' got hyuh yistiday, an' had my min' made up to do it; but I had tuh hide out one day an' night, an' sink de ole raf'."

"Injuns?"

"No; dem cowboys up de river. Dey seen me, but 'twas jes' at de aidge o' night, an' dey didn't see what I had. I sunk it befo' I pulled up to de sho', an' dat way I fooled 'em. When dey ax me what has I got in de canoe, I say I got myse'f in it—an' it's de troof. Dey see dat I ain' got nuffin' but some meal an' meat, an' a gun an a few yuther things, when dey done take a look. So dey went away. But, not knowin' but dey might be watchin', I lef' de stuff stay in de water a whole day an' night. It's sho' wet goods now, boss; an' no mistake."

He laughed in the hilarious negro fashion.

Climbing out, he helped pull the canoe well up on the bank, and swung the raft in to the shore, where it was held by a stake thrust into the mud beyond it.

Lashed to the raft were a number of boxes, covered with a tarpaulin. When the covering was stripped off the boxes were seen to be cases of whisky.

"How in the name o' Sam Hill could you sink the raft—that is, in a hurry?" the man demanded, as he inspected the whisky cases.

The negro ki-yied again.

"You ain' noticin' dem ropes is spliced," he said,



amused. "I cut de ropes w'at held de cases, and let 'em slide into de water."

"That ain't sinkin' the raft."

"I stuck de raf' into some willers."

"An' they didn't see it?"

"Dey seen it—yes, suh. Dat's what make me all de trouble. Dey want to know what has been on de raf'. I tell 'em nuffin' ain't been on de raf' but me—dat I sleeps on it. Den dey tells me I is lyin', and dey s'plores round an' pokes in de water; but dey didn't git de whisky. 'Case why?—dey cain't find it."

"When war this?" asked the man anxiously.

"Three days ago, boss. But I sho' give 'em de slip. When I moves I does it in de night; an' I ain't seen 'em ag'in."

The white man climbed to the top of the bank and looked long and distrustfully up the river. But no one was in sight.

"I guess you throwed 'em, Rastus," he said, coming down.

"Ain't no doubt but I did, boss."

"And you seen no Injuns?"

"Not a one."

"Some of 'em was over yisterday, wantin' whisky. I tol' 'em I'd have plenty next week, and they could git their furs ready, if they wanted it bad. They won't wait till next week, if they hear that the stuff has come."

He helped the negro pull the raft against the bank, where they lashed it to a cottonwood. Then they began to lug the heavy cases ashore and carry them into the house.

It was a cabin, as has been said, built of cottonwood poles, chinked, and daubed with yellow mud, the yellow stripes between the poles giving it a sort of zebra look. The roof was of poles and riven clap boards. The front of the house was away from the river, and on the river side the house overhung the water, that end being on piling that lifted it a few feet above the stream. There was no door and no window on the river side, and but one door and one window at the front, with a barred hole higher up. The cabin was rather tall, so that from the outside it looked to be a story and a half in height.

It was hard work carrying the cases of whisky into the house, up the steep and slippery bank, and the white man and the negro rested at times and talked.

Generally, the talk concerned the incidents of the negro's trip to the mountain town, where he had sold furs and bought the liquor. He had taken up a string of ponies laden with furs, and had disposed of the ponies as well as the furs, the negotiations having been conducted through an agent there, it appeared. The furs and ponies the white man had got from the Indians by trading whisky.

"You ain't hear no talk 'bout an Injun war?" said the negro.

The man took out his pipe, broke open a package of tobacco the negro had brought out of the canoe, and

lighted it with a match, produced also from the canoe's cargo.

"Who do I see to talk to but Injuns? Good thing them cowboys didn't tumble to this tobacco."

"I throwed it out on the groun', beyond de willers, and dey didn't see it."

"Ah-h! Now, that's what I calls terbacker, and to light it without havin' to hammer sparks from a piece o' flint is certain sure satisfaction!"

The negro smoked with him.

"I'm certainly congratulatin' you, Rastus. You aire a peart nigger."

"W'en dey gits ahead o' Rastus dey has tuh bresh de dew f'um deir feet mighty early in de mawnin'. You didn't hear no mo' 'bout dat Black Chief, did yo'?"

The white man laughed.

"Thar ye go ag'in! Who do I git to talk to out hyar? You're the favored one o' this pardnership, you black dawg. You git to go up to town, while I stay hyar an' mix with Injuns an' kyotes."

He puffed thoughtfully, with eyes half closed.

"What was it yuh heard 'bout an Injun war?" he asked.

"Dat's all; de white men was talkin' about it. Dey says de Injuns down heah mixes medicine oncet a month reg'lar. I could 'a' tol' 'em how come it so is dat 'bout oncet a month we gits in a new supply o' fiah water. Ki-yi!"

"But you kep' yer mouth shet?"

"Trus' me, boss. W'en I goes tuh talkin' hit will be w'en de night hoss is ridin' me so hahd I don' know nuffin'. Ki-yi!"

"I reckon we better git up the rest o' them cases."

They continued to smoke, as they lugged up the other cases, and kept it up while they cached them in the cabin.

Removing boards from the floor, holes were disclosed, and into them the whisky cases were lowered. When the boards were in place again there was nothing to hint of the whisky caches beneath.

Having finished this job to their satisfaction, they tore the raft to pieces, cut the cottonwood logs that composed it into stove wood for their fires, and burned up the ropes; so that, finally, nothing remained in sight to tell of the negro's voyage but the canoe; and even that was tucked under the overhang of the cabin, where the cottonwood poles came close down to the water.

With a bottle of whisky from one of the cases, the negro and the white man made merry for a while; then, even that was hid away.

"Got to see that we're all ready fer the Injuns when they come," said the white man.

From a long box that rested by one of the walls he brought a queer effigy, human in shape, but representing neither black man, white man, nor red; it wore white men's clothing, however. If it resembled anything, it was one of those hideous idols wild Africans bow down to, or did once upon a time, in the Congo for



This effigy the white man set up against the door, fastening it to it, so that its feet cleared the floor. Up through one foot he then ran a tube, that came through a small hole in the floor, and secured that in place. But his work was not done until he had placed in the right hand of the effigy a cocked revolver, which was then concealed by dropping hand and revolver into the coat pocket on that side.

When the door stood wide open, the effigy looked into the room; when the door was shut, it looked off across the open land before the cabin.

"Dat sho' has got 'em millin', boss," said the negro, cackling again, as he looked upon the hideous thing. "An' I don' wondeh! When you done put it up de fus' time dis hyuh nigger couldn't sleep at night. Ki-yi!"

"It's a cute thing."

"Call it dat if you wants tuh. I ain't got no name for it. But it sho' does skeer Injuns."

He strolled out to the stable, a structure of poles and mud, like the house.

The white man, standing in the cabin door, heard him singing in the stable:

"En yo' golden slippehs mus' be neat an' clean,  
En yo' age mus'-a be jes'-a sweet sixteen,  
En de darkies all say you will hab a good time,  
W'en yo' ride up in de char'yut in de mawnin'."

Turning back into the cabin, the white man took down a small package of newspapers, brought by the negro, and opened it.

They were half a month old, and he was not much of a reader; but he pored through them, interested in the latest news from civilization.

His eyes dropping on a headline, he looked at it hard, and read a few words below it.

"What's this?" he said.

He rubbed his eyes, and began to read again.

The paper was from Ogallala, the biggest town on the river, below him, and Buffalo Bill's name appeared in the headline. This is the body of the news item:

"Buffalo Bill, the noted scout, who is now in Ogallala, had an interview yesterday with Jack Brandon and his sister, on from Ohio, searching for their father, who came to this section some years ago, and strangely dropped out of sight. Brandon carries a letter from the Secretary of War, showing that he is all right; and the letter urges every one on the border who can do so to help him in his search, particularly scouts and soldiers. Brandon's father, it seems, went into the Sioux country back in the seventies, just before the gold craze struck the Black Hills. He wrote home a few times, speaking of his hopes of soon striking it rich; then his letters stopped. His last letter was written somewhere along the Missouri River, above here; and it appears it was given into the hands of another man, who brought it down the river and mailed it. Buffalo Bill is going into the Sioux country, on account of the rumors of Indian trouble there—it being reported that the band of Sioux known as the

Buffalo Killers are dancing and threatening to take to the warpath. Because of this, there is a good deal of excitement and uneasiness all along the border. Brandon and his sister wanted to go with Cody, but the noted scout thought it was inadvisable, owing to the present situation. With him here now are Pawnee Bill and a number of his friends. It is thought they will set out in a day or two, as they are now fitting out."

The bearded man, with finger on the page, read this through to the last word.

When he looked up his face held an ashen pallor, and in his eyes was a strange light.

"They'll be comin' here," he whispered hoarsely. "I'm bettin' they'll be comin' here!"

Under stress of excitement he had dropped the dialectic twist generally noticeable in his speech.

"I can fool Cody," he said; "but—can I fool them? But perhaps they won't come."

He read again the statement that Buffalo Bill would not permit the Brandons to accompany his party.

"I hope Cody sticks to that," he said; "I hope he does!"

He let the paper lie on his knees, and looked off into space.

"Twenty years ago—no, fifteen years ago—I come here. It's hard to keep track of time. It was twenty years ago that I left home, back in Ohio, and there's been a lot of things happened—but not here. Don't nothin' much ever happen here, 'ceptin' Injun troubles, and the like of that. And they don't bother me. But now——"

He got up, letting the paper slide to the floor, and walked to the door. When he put up his hand against the door it rested close beside the grotesque effigy. For a long time he stood looking over the rolling land before the door, and down the river in the direction of Ogallala. Then he turned back, looked through the other newspapers, and put them all out of sight.

Having done this, he walked out to the stable.

He had resumed his pipe and his former manner, and the ashy pallor was fading out of his bearded cheeks.

The negro, rubbing down the horses in the stable, was still singing:

"Dem golden slippehs I'se a-gwine to w'ar,  
When Ah walk upon dem golden streets."

## CHAPTER II.

### A STARTLED REDSKIN.

As soon as the white man disappeared in the stable an Indian's head feather rose out of a willow clump by the stream, followed by the head and body of the Indian.

Snuggling his blanket closely about him, the Indian began to steal cautiously toward the cabin, keeping it between himself and the stable.



He had been up to the cabin before, when the white man and the negro were in it, and, through a hole made by the falling away of some of the mud daubing of the walls, he had looked in and seen them drinking whisky out of the bottle.

The Indian was a Sioux, of the tribal section bearing the name of Buffalo Killers, and he had approached the cabin in the hope of getting fire water.

It seemed now to his savage mind that a great opportunity had come, wherein he could satisfy at the same time his innate love of fire water and his equally innate love of stealing. He would rather steal the fire water, or anything else, than buy it, or even have it given to him.

Having from his place of concealment seen the landing of the canoe and raft, and the carrying of the whisky cargo into the cabin, he thought he could readily lay his hands on as many bottles as he could lug off, and get away with the feat while the white man and the negro were in the stable.

To accomplish this feat required haste; and he hastened, but with moccasins shod with silence.

When he gained the cabin wall it was necessary for him to reach the one door, which was at the front and in full view from the stable. This, he knew, would require quick work, and, after that, a quick get-away with the coveted goods.

When he poked his Roman nose round the corner of the cabin he saw no one, and made a silent jump for the door.

He nearly retreated when he saw the effigy on the door. He had heard of the thing many times, and had even seen it; but he had braced his courage to face it, and get past it into the house. He was helped in this determination now by the fact that, the door being wide open, the eyes of the thing did not look in his direction.

So he ducked and sidled by it, shivering suddenly, as if a cold wind had struck him. He would not look at it.

Then a startling thing occurred—so startling that when it happened the Indian bounded halfway to the ceiling and let out a yell that was sufficient evidence of his fright.

As he started to cross the room, to look for the whisky bottle, the image on the door emitted a screeching and hair-raising whistle; and when the Indian gave an involuntary jump, and whirled to dash out, the right arm of the image swung out of the pocket, pointing a revolver, and a loud explosion followed.

The redskin's eagle feather was shorn away by the bullet. Feeling the quick tug of the lead, he thought his scalp lock was gone, and yelled again.

A kangaroo jump took him through the door, and another round the corner of the cabin, after which he ran with a speed that straightened the flowing blanket out behind him like a floating table.

By the time the white man and the negro were out of the stable the Indian was in the willows, and before they reached the open cabin door the redskin was in

the river, submerged to his nose, and was going downstream with the swiftness of a swimming otter.

White man and negro, swinging revolvers, ran round the cabin, when they discovered that it was empty, and stared off at the river, without seeing the intruder.

"What's de meanin', boss?"

"Some one got into the house, o' course, and got out too quick for us to see him."

He drew back cautiously, round the corner of the cabin.

"Better git back hyar, Rastus," he advised. "The critter tuck to the willers, ye kin be shore, an' he might sling lead."

Rastus ducked back.

"I don' see nobody."

"He's hidin' thar. I'm figgerin' it war a red, lookin' for whisky. Reason I figger that out is, thar ain't no white men round hyar—not any as we know of."

"Ef he went into dem willers, it is sho' likely dat he has tuck to de water," said the negro.

"You keep watch hyar, while I look round in the cabin."

As he stepped in he saw the eagle plume which the bullet had sheared away, on the floor.

"Jes' as I thought—a red; an' ol' Moloch come mighty nigh a-gittin' him."

He looked at the hideous figure on the door, and stepped carefully, striding wide as he walked across the room, taking particular care not to tread on certain boards of the floor.

"He got his skeer, an' got it good, 'bout soon's he entered," he commented, as he looked round. "That war shore the best shootin' ol' Moloch ever done. I reckon if his arm had drapped lower he'd 'a' plugged that redskin right plumb through the skull. Looks it."

He picked up the plume and examined it.

"Sioux—jes' as I thought; Buffler Killer Sioux. And, o' course, he wanted whisky—they all do. An' he 'lowed he'd git it without pay, while I war out in the stable. That's plain enough."

With a sudden jerk of apprehension and remembrance, he glanced at the box in which he had thrust the newspapers. But they remained undisturbed.

"I'll have to tuck them away better. Ain't no use even of Rastus seein' them."

He stepped over and pushed the package farther into the box. Then he turned round and went outside.

"Ain't seen a fink, boss," Rastus reported. "Ef he is hidin' in dem willers, he is sho' roostin' close to de ground."

"You still watch hyar, whilst I goes out on the hill and takes a look frum thar," the white man requested; "ain't no sense in walkin' straight up to the willers. He's been skeered bad. Skeer him a little more, an' he might go to shootin' wicked. Ye cain't never tell what a red will do, in them conditions."

Slowly he walked out to the rise above the river, watchful of the willows and the stream, a cocked revolver swinging ready in his right hand.



But by the time he gained the ridge and looked down into the willows the redskin was a quarter of a mile downstream, and still going.

"I don't see nothin'," he called back to the negro.

"Same hyuh. Dat redskin is playin' alligator, ef down dar."

The white man returned to the cabin.

"Huccome you can be so sho' dat it was an Injun?" the negro demanded.

"What else could it been?"

"Acksdent."

The white man exhibited the warrior's plume.

"Found this on the floor. You can see whar the bullet cut it."

"Wah-hoo! Ol' Molick was done shootin' close dat time. I ain't wondeh dat redskin flew. He didn't need no bird wings to send 'im along. Ki-yi!"

He looked at the willows.

"Skeered lack dat says, I bet he ain't dar now. Ef he didn't have yuthers wid him, he'd keep a-goin'."

"I think he was alone, and that he saw us unload the raft. Then, when we war both in the barn, he cal'lated he'd try fer some o' the fire water. He stepped on the boards thar, and ol' Moloch got into gear. He come mighty nigh bein' a dead redskin. Well, so long's no more harm was done, it will be a good thing. He'll tell about it, and the others will keep off, or come with the goods to trade."

"You don't reckon dey can be yuthers in de wilers?"

"We can find out."

"An' git shot? You go do it, boss; I'll stay hyuh an' watch. Ki-yi!"

Though confident that the Indian had made an escape by way of the river, they watched the willows an hour, before the white man was willing to venture down to investigate.

What he found when he got there were moccasin tracks in the mud, and close by the water, where the Indian had approached, and then had so hurriedly taken his departure.

"He got into the river an' swum downstream," he reported, when he came back to the cabin, where the negro had remained, refusing to take part in the investigation. "And he's fur enough off by now."

Together they reëntered the cabin, after talking it over, stepping high and wide, to avoid the boards that the Indian had touched.

"Git me a ca'tridge, Rastus."

The negro brought over a fluted belt, filled with forty-fives:

"Des' de looks o' dat critteh is enough to th'ow a man into a sweat, widout him beginnin' to shoot wid dat pistol an' blow his whistle. I bet yo', dat Injun don' come roun' hyuh no mo'."

The white man tried to laugh, but unsuccessfully. He was thinking of the newspaper report that had startled him quite as much as the action of ol' Moloch had startled the rum-thirsty redskin.

Taking the revolver, he reloaded the discharged

chamber; then he carefully readjusted it in the hand of the image, with the weapon cocked, and a wire finger touching the trigger, and hid hand and revolver in the coat pocket.

Looking on, the negro scratched his woolly head.

"Only thing what I don' like 'bout dis hyuh is," he remarked, "dat some day I's a-goin' to forgit 'bout dem boards; an' when I does—bim! I'm a-goin' to git a bullet."

"Waal, I don't keep it rigged up ready fer bizness all ther time!"

"Des' one time is enough—ef it gits me!"

"You needn't let it trouble you the rest of the afternoon, fer I'm goin' to let you straddle a hoss and go down river, and poke round down thar."

"Huntin' fuh dat Injun?"

"You can mebbys see whar he left the water, and find his trail. He didn't stay in the river long. Then you can find out if thar war any others with him. It's mighty important to know. I don't allow that thar is really any danger that they'd come back in the night and raid the place. I don't think they would; but I'd jes' like to know if he war alone."

The negro seemed rather glad to go—to get away from the danger he feared in the cabin; and as he passed out he sidled past the image, with his staring eyes fixed on the hideous face.

"Uh-huh!" he grunted, as he got outside and turned toward the stable. "Ol' Molick, he sho' does gib me de creeps. I wouldn't use no sich tricks, even to skeer Injuns; fur some day he's sho' a-goin' tuh git me or de boss. Now I'm talkin'!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### IMITATION COWBOYS.

Two hours before sunset the negro came back, and exchanged his horse for the canoe.

"I ain't no feesh," he said; "an' I don' like to swim. Dat Injun didn't come out on dis side."

"Why didn't you swim the hoss over?" the white man asked.

"I tried it, an' he bucked. He don' like water, neither, no betteh than me."

"Whisky is what you like."

"Ki-yi! Ef I liked it like some Injuns does, dem whisky cases'd never got down hyuh—now I tell yuh. You ain't been seein' nuthin' while I was gone?"

"Nothin'."

The negro pulled out the canoe, and drifted downstream, and the white man went back into the cabin, to a rereading of some of the things he had been picking out of the newspapers.

As before, he returned after a time to the Ogallala account of Buffalo Bill and the scout's interview with the Brandons.

"If they do come up hyar, the reds will sure corral 'em," he reflected aloud. "Me and Rastus could see to that, and could see that they didn't git away ag'in."



Give a red fire water, and he'll do anything. Besides, thar's reports, Rastus says, that the Buffler Killers aire fire eating and ready fer meanness. In that way it could be accounted fer easy, if an investigation was started. Yes, Rastus and me will see to that. But I'm hopin' they keep away."

He was startled from his reveries by a halloo.

"Rastus back? Yet that didn't sound like him."

He jumped to the door, the newspaper in his hands.

On a hill out in front sat two cowboys—as at first sight he judged them to be. One of them had sent the halloo.

The white man moved back, without answering, carefully avoiding the boards that connected with the image by concealed springs and wires, and tucked the newspapers out of sight, sweeping them together hastily.

Then he disconnected Moloch from the door, quite as hastily.

Not until he had stored the image out of sight in the long box by the wall, and had looked carefully round, to make sure that nothing of a telltale character was to be seen, did he appear at the door again.

The two cowboys were still out on the hill, when the white man stepped out in front of the cabin.

"Hello!" he called, answering the repeated hails. "Won't you drap down an' jine me?"

They rode forward at this invitation. As they approached he looked them over carefully.

One was thirty or thirty-five years old, he judged; the other younger and slighter in build. It gave him a start, when he discovered that their faces lacked the characteristic wind tan of the plains, and that they rode as if not thoroughly at home in their deep saddles.

"Them ain't no cowboys!" he growled, in his thick beard. "So, what does it mean?"

They came up and greeted him in a hopeful, cheery manner, sitting in their deep saddles before the cabin door. But he was on his guard, and wary, though he was trying not to show it.

"Won't ye light down?" he invited, seeking to be genial; and also because he wanted to get at the true inwardness of this, which he considered a strange thing, for he knew now that they were not cowboys.

The older of the two glanced off at the sun.

"About an hour until night," he said; "so we don't know but we'd like to accept your invitation. We've ridden far, and are beat out."

"Hyar is my house, and out thar is my stable; quarters fer men and for hosses; ye're welcome to 'em both."

They accepted his invitation, put their horses in the stable, and came into the cabin.

"Have you seen any Indians about?" was one of the things they asked him.

"Thar war a red round this neighborhood to-day," he said, "but I didn't connect up with him. I think he war jes' lookin' to steal somethin'; reds aire powerful bad as thieves."

"They don't trouble you, living out here so far from every one else?"

"Waal, I treats 'em right, ye know; so I ain't figger'n that they will bother me."

"But don't you get very lonesome here?" asked the younger of the two.

"Nope; ef I did, I wouldn't stay. Stands to reason that a man don't stay whar he don't like it, unless he has to."

"You hunt for a living, I suppose; and, of course, you're always armed?"

"Hunt an' trap," he said; "I been at it a good many y'ar now, an' enj'y it. Now and then I has comp'ny; when some one comes erlong, like you, and stops, bein' strangers to the country, they tells me stories about themselves, and so I has somethin' new to think about—fer a while."

The younger, who had been questioning, stopped, confused, and looked at the other.

"My name is Morgan," the speaker went on, in a tone that invited confidence, while he closely studied the face and figure of the younger; "Nat Morgan. You may have heerd o' me, fer I been on this border a long time, and does a consid'able bizness in fur tradin'."

"And you live here all alone?"

"I has a colored man livin' with me. I done him a favor onct, an' he has tuck to me, and stays hyar; he helps in the trappin' and huntin'. You ain't seein' him round, 'case he has gone down the river to-day in his canoe; but I reckon he'll be comin' back 'long about night."

The tone still invited confidence.

"Our name is Brandon," said the younger, with another look at the older.

The man who had given his name as Nat Morgan tightened his jaws almost convulsively and his face paled; but he made shift to conceal these things by rising and stepping toward the door.

"Thought I heerd that nigger comin' back," he said, as he turned about again.

He had control of himself, but his face was still pale. He knew it, and hustled about the room, finally producing his pipe and fussing with it and the package of tobacco.

His movements to and fro gave his visitors time and opportunity to put their heads together and exchange a whispered conference. The result was apparent when Morgan sat down and began to thumb tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"We think," said the elder, "that if we tell you our story, you can perhaps help us with information, if nothing else. We are strangers in this section."

"And not cowboys," said the younger.

"To tell the truth," continued the other, "we are brother and sister. I am Jack Brandon, and this is my sister Louise. I have always called her Lou; and that can stand for Louis as well as for Louise. We thought it would be safer and better every way if she wore man's clothing on this trip, for we expected to be



in some wild country; so we bought a cowboy outfit at Ogallala.

"Indians were reported troublesome up in this section, when we set out from Ogallala, and we feared we might run into them; but so far we haven't seen even one."

Morgan scratched a match noisily, drew it across his pipe, and hid his face behind a thick cloud of smoke, which he produced hastily.

"This hyar sounds mighty int'restin'," he said; "jes' fer all the world like a story. I didn't know but mebbys the little one war yer brother; but—yer sister! You've got me plum' millin', fer wonder."

"You think that it was foolish and reckless for me to come at all," said the girl, a hot flush now on her face; "but I couldn't stay behind there in Ogallala, after Jack was determined to go. You see, Mr. Cody was——"

"Buffer Bill, ye mean?" said Morgan, behind his screen of smoke.

"Yes; he wouldn't let Jack go with him. So Jack he decided to go alone."

"An' Buffer Bill? Whar is it he war goin'?"

"Out into this Indian country," said Jack Brandon, taking up the thread of conversation. "There are some Indians out here locally called the Buffalo Killers; they're Sioux, it's said. And it is said, also, that they have a black chief, who is reported to be a negro; and lately they have been war dancing and threatening a border war. On account of that, Cody and some of his friends were on the point of leaving Ogallala for this section; anyway, they were going to follow the Missouri River up, but I don't know how far. They hoped to do something to quiet the Indians and save trouble."

"Uh-huh!" grunted Morgan. "I see."

"When he wouldn't let me be a member of his party, I decided to go on alone; then my sister said she was going, if I did; and here we are. We got out of Ogallala the day before Buffalo Bill's party was to start."

"You was doin' this fer a reason, er fer fun?"

"For the most important reason in the world, Mr. Morgan. I'm coming now to that. We are here hunting for information of our father, Jasper Brandon, who came into this region several years ago. He pushed on toward the Black Hills, as he was looking for gold. We had a letter from him; or, rather, our family did—we were rather small then, you understand—a letter written from some point up here, on this very river. And that was the last."

"Uh-huh!"

"You've been in this country how many years, Mr. Morgan?"

"More'n I like to remember."

"And in all that time you never heard of Jasper Brandon?"

Morgan coughed—apparently he had swallowed some of the tobacco smoke.

"In all them y'ars I never has heerd of him."

"But you are very familiar with all this country, of course?" said the girl.

"I knows every mile of it."

"Then you can help us, I'm sure," said Jack Brandon. "And I'm going to ask you first, how far is it to where these Indians are—the Buffalo Killers?"

"I lopes on a hoss a good deal, and don't count miles; so I'll have ter figger. Lemme see—I reckon it's somewhar round fifty miles, if you mean their village; but you're li'ble to meet parties of 'em out anywhar; as I tol' ye, one of them war right in this cabin this afternoon, tryin' to steal somethin', as I reckoned."

"Right in here?" said the girl, looking round.

"I heard him—I was out at the stable; and he war gone 'fore I could git into the house; he went that quick."

"And he didn't steal anything?"

"Not's I could diskiver."

"This talk of trouble with the Indians; there is nothing in it, is there?" asked Jack Brandon. "We didn't take much stock in it."

"Fer why?"

"We met men there in Ogallala who said that; they said the Indians were always dancing up here, and that it didn't amount to anything; that there had been no serious trouble with them for years. They got whisky somewhere, was the report, and at times that made them ugly; but they had been thoroughly whipped and cowed long ago, and would never again try to make trouble. They advised us that if we wanted to come up here it would be as safe as if we took a pleasure jaunt out through any country."

"You don't think that?" said the girl anxiously.

"That the reds gits likker?"

"That they are entirely peaceful, and will stay so?"

"They're plum' peaceable—to me. That's the only way I can judge, ain't it. All the y'ars I has lived hyar I ain't been molested, 'ceptin', as I reported, onct in a while a red sneaks in hyar an tries to steal something."

"But even that doesn't make serious trouble for you?"

"I don't make no trouble at all; they're plum' peaceable—to me."

"It makes me feel easier to hear you say so," she confessed.

"Lou is a brave girl," said her brother; "there isn't a braver girl anywhere, and if we had to fight a tribe of Indians she would stand up to the work; that is, if, by doing it, she thought we could locate father."

"It's the thinking about it beforehand that makes me nervous, that's all," she admitted.

Morgan blew away the smoke with which he had been enveloping his head and looked at them craftily—just a sharp look, shot like a spear.

"You're thinkin' that mebbys yer dad is livin' yit?"

"We're hoping that he is. We have thought of many things that might have happened to him; for one thing, he might be held by the Indians as a pris-



oner. That is why we want to go on to this Indian village. And it is also the reason we asked if you knew anything about the Black Chief."

"I see."

His head was again in the tobacco smoke.

"I have thought, too," said the girl, "since sitting here, that we might perhaps be able to hire you as a guide, to conduct us to that village."

"I reckon I could do it," he said, a queer click in his voice.

"And if it is only fifty miles, it wouldn't take long to go there, on our horses."

"But you couldn't go on to-night, nohow."

"We're going to ask you," said Jack Brandon, "to let us stay here in your house to-night. And we'd like to leave our animals in your stable. We could pay you——"

"Out hyar thar ain't no pay fer sech things," said Morgan; "and you kin stay an' welcome, if you can put up with the place and the poor stuff I've got to feed ye with."

He began to bustle round, getting out things for supper, but he was careful not to go near the long box that held old Moloch, and now and then he caught himself stepping high and wide to avoid certain boards in the floor.

The girl asked to help him get supper, but he refused.

"I know whar the things aire," he explained, "an' twon't take me long. Last trip my nigger made to the tradin' store he brought down a few things, so we can have bacon an' coffee, an' reg'lar flour bread. You're welcome to everything I has got. It's so seldom that I sees a white face that your comin' has made me feel spry as a boy."

He certainly stepped alertly as he moved about; but his face was still pale, and a close observer might have detected that his assumed geniality and friendliness was a forced product.

As he prepared the coffee and fried the bacon he asked again and again about Buffalo Bill, and about Jasper Brandon.

Once he made a peculiar slip; at the moment he seemed to be musing:

"Old Jeff Ellers said onct——"

He stopped as suddenly as he began.

The brother and sister looked at him.

"You've been in Tannersville, Ohio?" asked Jack Brandon.

"Never heerd o' ther place," said Morgan, stooping over the frying pan. "Whyever do you ask that?"

"Well, I didn't suppose there was a Jeff Ellers anywhere else in the world but in Tannersville."

"This hyar Jeff Ellers what I knowed," lied Morgan, "lived out in Denver, but he's dead now—dead y'ars ago. Pokin' at this hyar meat made me think of him. We used to cook together, an' bunk together, an' hunt together; but it war y'ars ago."

The supper was good, they said; they had healthy appetites and were hungry. And Jack Brandon, sam-

pling Morgan's smoking tobacco after supper, said that was good, too.

Moved by his pretended spirit of hospitality, Morgan started to get out his whisky bottle, but changed his mind before he reached the shelf where he kept it, and said:

"You'll have ter occupy the upstairs room, but bein' that you're brother and sister, that will be all right. I won't need to wake ye airy in the morning."

At a late hour they went upstairs together, two cowboy-looking figures, and vanished from his side, after they had climbed the narrow ladder and slipped through the cubby-hole door.

Morgan looked after them, his face whitening again, then stepped to the shelf, took down his bottle of whisky, and drank.

Holding it in his hand he looked toward the ladder.

"Injuns won't trouble you, an' you won't trouble the Injuns—now," he whispered; "and I won't need to wake ye up airy in the morning. I've got to stay in this country, an' I'm a-goin' to. So good-by!"

Slipping to the overhang after a while, he got busy with a wrench.

Some time later, hearing a scratching on the door, he jumped as if shot at.

When he opened the door he beheld the head of the negro.

"You're shakin' like er dawg," he said, "an' wet as a drowned rat; what's the meanin'?"

"Fo' Lawd's sake, lemme in, boss!" the negro begged.

"Come in, then, but be quiet. What's happened to ye?"

With the door closed behind him; the negro stood up and rolled his eyes round. His clothing was soaked, and he was shaking with fright.

"Who's hosses is dem in de stable?"

Morgan jerked a finger toward the ladder and the upper room.

"The riders o' them hosses have been upstairs," he said, in an impressive whisper, "an' now aire thar!" He pointed down. "Did them hosses skeer ye?"

"No, boss, not dem; it was somepin' wuss'n hosses. Gimme a drink, will ye? I sho' is goin' tuh drap, ef yo' doan't do it quick."

"Keep still," warned Morgan, his hands trembling, as he brought out the whisky, "and tell me what has happened!"

The negro gurgled the whisky bottle over his nose and took fresh courage.

"You knows I went down the river in de boat," he said.

"Yes, this afternoon, tryin' to find out what had become of that redskin."

"'Twan't him, boss, but it happened on de river, not fur off f'um dis place. I was paddlin' 'long sof', when somepin' grab de gunnel o' dat boat; an' me, I des goes oveh into de water. And den—he rolled his eyes round—"de thing grabbed me by de laig!"

"It was a fish," said Morgan; "you're a fool——"



"Hesh, man, till you heah what I'se tellin' yo'; dat feesh done talked!"

"What?"

Brandon's voice rose in spite of his desire to keep it down.

"I'm speakin' it; dat feesh done could talk; fo' I heard it."

"What do you mean?"

"I doan' know what I mean. All I am knowin' is I got back in de boat, wid dat feesh hangin' tuh my laig, an' den I got away f'm it. When I come to mah senses, boss, I was paddlin' dat ole canoe twenty miles an hour ag'inst dat ole Missouri current. Naw, I ain' lyin' tuh yuh, an' I ain't been drinkin'; I ain't seen no likker sense I lef' de house hyuh; I'm des tellin' you de troof."

"Perhaps it war that Injun you tried to foller."

"Boss, dat feesh didn't talk no Injun way o' talkin'; dat feesh done talk like he is a edjicated white man; dat's what he talk like."

Morgan gave a jump and looked scared; then took a drink from the whisky bottle himself.

"I don't reckon—— Set down," he commanded, "and tell me all about it."

"I has done tol' you all about it; all what I know."

Morgan clutched a clumsy chair, steadied himself, and sat down.

"I learnt a few things—whilst you war gone," he said. "Them hosses belongs to two young fools that come out hyar projeckin' round, in spite o' the fact that they had been warned thar war a likelihood of Injun trouble an' they might lose their scalps. Funny thing is," he looked round furtively and sank his voice to a whisper, "they come frum a place whar I used to be knowed. If they stay round hyar they may recognize me, so I concluded to invite 'em to walk upstairs."

The negro rolled the whites of his eyes at the ceiling.

"Too bad tuh do dat, boss," he said, "if hit ain't needed!"

"I thought it war needed."

"Too bad tuh do hit, anyway, boss."

"That's a p'int fer me to settle."

The negro rolled his eyes again at the ceiling and shook his head.

"Nohow, I doan't want no sech bizness fo' mine," he urged.

"You ain't listenin' to me. They come from Ogalala, and the day after they set out fer this section, Buffler Bill set out with a party fer the same place."

"Dat's goin' to make trouble, ef he comes foolin' round hyuh."

"The p'int I'm comin' to is this."

"I'm lissenin', boss."

"Could that thing that got hold of you have been Buffler Bill or one of his men—or the young feller that was up thar?"

"I doan' know, boss; I dunno nuffin; but dat feesh which got me by de laig an' mos' tip oveh de canoe has sho' got a white man's voice."

"I reckon I'm jes' skeery," said Morgan, tapping the whisky bottle again, "and I reckon you imagined the most o' that; can't be no other way. But even if it's so—what of it?"

"Come mighty neah drowndin' me, boss!"

"Suppose even that it was Buffler Bill himself—and that's a plum' foolish supposition; it don't prove anything. Suppose he had clim' into the canoe with you, and had come on to the cabin hyar with ye, and he had come in, an' set in thet chair, an' said that he is Buffler Bill, that wouldn't amount to anything—so long as he don't know what we aire doin' hyar. And, of course, it couldn't been him—that's foolish; and I think you imagined it. As fer the young fool who was up thar——"

"Gimme me anotheh drink, boss," the negro begged; "I'm skeered, an' I doan' know nuffin'."

## CHAPTER IV.

### OLD NOMAD IN THE UPSTAIRS ROOM.

The man who came to the top of the hill before the cabin, the next day, followed the trail of two horses. He was an old man, and was mounted on a wiry, raw-boned horse.

Drawing rein when he beheld the cabin, he shaded his eyes with his hand and inspected it.

"Waal, they went thar," he said, "er my name ain't Nick Nomad. I ain't been erlong this part o' the old Mizzoury fer y'ars, an' I didn't know 'bout that cabin. Ef anybody's at home I can ast a few questions, an' ef not I kin pick up the trail ag'in. But thet boy an' gal aire plum' the biggest fools thet ever hit saddle leather."

He continued to mumble his thoughts, after he had again set his horse in motion.

"Ef all signs don't fail, thar's er goin' ter be a heap o' Injun deviltry kicked up in this kentry soon er sooner. Yisterday I found a signal arrer settin' in the mud by the river; et war painted red, which shore means war, an' et war bent over in the direction of the nearest white men's settlements, which meant, ergin, thet they're to be struck; then et had a half moon nicked by a knife in one side, which meant that ther killin' would bergin in half a month. And et had been set thar in the mud three days er so ago; the dryness o' the mud an' other things told thet."

"Down on Porkypine Creek, as I comer erlong three days ago, I met up with my ole friend, Wolf-eye Simpson, what has a cabin thar, and keeps ther run o' things, an' he said thet ther Buffler Killer reds has been crowhoppin' fer two months, at intervals, and singin' war songs. Last time he war up by their village he tried to sneak in, and git a look at ther Black Chief—him bein' et up by cur'osity on thet p'int, but he couldn't. An'——"

He came up by the stable and drew rein suddenly, cutting short his mumbling cogitations.

"Waugh!" he grunted, looking through the open



door of the stable. "Ef them ain't ther two caballos I has been this long time trailin', I'm blind o' one eye an' cain't see out o' t'other."

There were two other horses in the stable, but he gave them no attention.

"So I reckon the two fools I has follered aire in thet house. Waal, I'll jes' step in and see 'em, and then I'll give 'em the mind of an ole man what don't approve o' no sech foolishness."

When he drew up before the door and hailed, the door was swung open promptly, and Nat Morgan appeared.

Nomad had been smiling, but the wrinkles round his mouth suddenly hardened and his expression changed.

"No, I reckon I won't come in," he said, when Morgan invited him to enter, "but I'll ax ye 'bout ther owners o' them two mustang caballos back in yer stable?"

Morgan stared and hesitated. He was on the point of declaring that they were his; then decided not to.

"The owners o' them mustangs stopped with me las' night," he said, studying Nomad's face, which was unfamiliar to him.

"So they ain't hyar now?"

"They're round somewhars—I dunno jes' whar. You war wantin' to see 'em?"

"Ruther," said Nomad dryly.

"They walked out down toward the river, more'n two hours ago; I been lookin' fer 'em back any time."

Nomad dug a heel into Hide-rack.

"I'll jes' mosey down thar an' connect up wi' 'em," he said.

"You come back—if ye don't find 'em," said Morgan, with peculiar emphasis.

"Thankee kindly," said Nomad, taking out his pipe and biting on the stem, "I will."

He chewed at the pipe stem as he went down the slope, to hide the distrustful expression which he feared was revealing itself in his face. At the same time he kept his head half turned, as if he looked at the ground; but it was for the purpose of having an ear trained on the cabin, for somehow, without any apparent good reason, he feared a shot from the man, yet he believed, should it be attempted, he could detect its coming by some movement.

"Waugh!" he mouthed, as he got down by the willows. "Thar's a snake fer ye. I has got ter investigate him shore as shootin'."

He looked about for tracks, having in mind the shape of shoes he was to look for, as he had seen their outlines at more than one camping place. At the end of ten minutes he had covered a good deal of ground.

"Them two fools playin' cowboys didn't come down by this place none whatever," he growled; "so thet war a lie; they couldn't walk down hyar without makin' tracks."

He went on beside the willows, then back-tracked and criss-crossed.

"Er lie," he grumbled; "er big lie. Now," he looked off at the cabin, "whyever was thet lie spoke?"

He drove old Hide-rack farther along the stream, looking everywhere. Suddenly he reined in.

"Injuns!" he whispered, and dropped a hand softly to his revolver.

There was a moccasin track in the mud.

When he went farther on, his keen old eyes searching every yard of ground, he discovered other moccasin tracks.

"Been between a dozen er twenty redskins right hyar this very day," he said; "an' thet critter up thar either didn't know et er didn't want ter mention et. What war they doin' hyar?"

Further searching showed that the Indians had disembarked from a canoe, that the canoe had come from down the river, and gone up the river—this last being in the direction of the cabin. The indentations made by the prow, the peculiar manner in which the sand and mud had been brushed by it, and by the feet of the Indians as they got out of the canoe and entered it, said all this to the keen-eyed old borderman, whose work as a trail finder and sign reader could hardly be equalled, or even approached, by any white man on the frontier.

Turning his horse about, after having made these discoveries, old Nomad rode slowly along the stream, in the direction of the cabin.

As he did so he watched for more "sign," and at the same time kept a watch on the cabin and on the river banks opposite, for he had no notion of being shot down or bushwhacked from beyond the river.

When he came close up to the cabin he saw that the canoe had landed there, that the Indians had got out, on that side of the cabin, and that they had ascended the bank. Then a telltale odor reached him—the odor of stale whisky.

Nomad looked for an empty whisky bottle, and did not see it; the odor came from the ground.

"Them redskins had likker and spilt some o' et hyar; must er hurt 'em bad ter done that; I'm wonderin' ef thet whisky come frum this cabin? This is a purty hide-out hyar, snugged in under them hills and screened by willers."

His eyes flicked over the cabin, taking in the details.

"They went to the cabin and they come back, then got in the canoe and left. So I reckon I has got ter interview thet feller up thar erg'in, though he won't like et. An' ef I do I has got to make out friendly."

Morgan was at the cabin door when Nomad appeared there.

"I didn't see nothin' of them two fellers I war lookin' fer," the latter reported.

"Waal, they may not git back before to-morrer, er mebbysso the next day," said Morgan, "fer, ye see, they went out wi' ther idee of flaggin' and shootin' antelopes. That war why they left their hosses in my stable; thought they could do better on foot."

Nomad looked about. The ground before the door was hard, and the moccasin tracks did not show, nor had they shown except close by the river.



"Won't you light," said Morgan, "an' lemme put yer hoss in the stable? I got room enough still in thar."

"Thankee kindly," said Nomad; "I will."

He swung down, then walked out to the stable with Morgan, where old Hide-rack was made comfortable.

"Whyever did ye want to see them two men?" asked Morgan.

"Only cause is, I ain't seen 'em in a good while—not sense they left Ogallala. What I'm thinkin' of now is, I seen Injun tracks down by the willers, an' ef they went down thar mebbys they fell inter ther hands o' them Injuns."

Morgan started; he had not known that the Indians had disembarked in the willows—a thing they had done silently and secretly, with the idea of making certain whether the owner of the cabin was at home before they showed themselves. They had come to trade furs for whisky, but they had preferred to steal the whisky, if they could. Morgan had been at home, so they had reëmbarked and came up to the cabin. They traded furs for what whisky they got; for they were afraid of Morgan, and afraid of the thing he kept on his door.

"I didn't know any Injuns had been down thar," he said; "but, even so, the Injuns hyarbouts aire plum' friendly enough ter eat out o' yer hand."

"Then, o' course, them two fellers aire safe ernough; I didn't know."

"What war bringin' you into the kentry?" Morgan asked, as they walked toward the cabin.

"My caballo, when I warn't walkin'. You're trappin' round hyar?"

"Been trappin' round hyar a long time," said Morgan.

"Thet's what I war thinkin' o' doin' myself, and war lookin' fer er good trappin' ground. But sense you're hyar ahead o' me, I'll haf to git funder upstream, I reckon."

Morgan did not like that; a trapper upstream might see the negro, when he made his pony trips and canoe voyages.

"Waal, ye cain't go on until mornin'," he said, "so come in, and help yerself to anything I got. But I believe I ain't heerd yer name yit. Mine is Morgan—Nat Morgan."

Nomad's mind searched for a name.

"Mine's Bill Blazer," he declared.

"Frum Ogallala?"

"Frum everywhar; I jes' happened ter tech Ogallala last."

When they went inside they smoked and talked. Nomad's eyes took in his surroundings. And his nose took in whisky fumes.

As if he suspected this, and to cover them up, Morgan produced his whisky bottle.

"On'y fer snake bite," said Nomad; "an' then I gin'rally put et on ter ther bite, 'stead o' into my stumick."

He heard Morgan's story of his life—wholly im-

aginary, and told the story of his own life, which was also wholly imaginary.

Still studying Morgan, he took supper with him, and, not satisfied, decided to stay all night, when Morgan pressed him to do so.

Shown to the upper room, reached by ladder and trapdoor, Nomad looked about him, when Morgan had departed.

There was a narrow bed, and there had been two skin cots on the floor, which Morgan had folded up and poked into a corner, and there were two chairs, if the home-made contrivances doing duty as such may be called chairs. The walls were bare, and the floor was uncarpeted.

The thing that Nomad rebelled against mentally was that the room had no window. True, there was a substitute, at the head of the little bed—a square hole, to let in air, this hole being grated with iron bars.

"Looks like er jail," said Nomad, examining the bars, "and yer uncle jes' natcherly hates ther thought o' strained air, whether er comes through bars like them, er moskeeter nettin'."

He stepped to the trapdoor, lifted it, and called down to his host.

"Whyever aire them bars?" he demanded.

"Oh, on the winder?" said Morgan.

"Is et a winder?"

"Thar has been times," said Morgan, stepping under the opening, "when wild cats has clim' the notched cottonwood poles at ther corner thar an' got inter thet upper room, and so I set in them bars. You kin rest certain thet no wild cats kin git at ye."

"I reckon I'll jes' leave this hyar trapdoor open, then," said Nomad, "so's to pull the strained air on through, an' make breathin' healthier. I'm er crank fer pure air an' plenty; comes o' my beastly habit o' sleepin' outdoors 'most all ther time."

Leaving the trapdoor open, he retreated to the cot by the barred square hole, and looked round, by aid of the feeble starlight that came in. Morgan had removed the candle with which he had shown his guest to this hole under the roof.

"Ef I couldn't give a man more decenter quarters ter sling his blanket in than this," Nomad grumbled, "I'd sleep him out in the front yard."

Under ordinary conditions the old trapper would have refused to stay in the room, but now he determined to forego his own desires, his suspicions against Morgan having been violently excited by this act of placing him in that room looking so like a prison.

After quietly testing the bars and discovering that they were set solidly in the very wall itself, and thinking the matter over, he made a rather noisy pretense of going to bed.

But he had not removed his clothing, and he lay wide awake, with a hand on his revolver beside him.

"This hyar Morgan is plum' crooked, and I'd like him ter show his hand. Them two innercents thet I follered frum close ter Ogallala come right hyar, an' they didn't go erway, so fur as I can see; yit they ain't



ter be seen, though their caballos aire in the stable. I went down ther way Morgan said, and found he had lied erbout et; wa'n't no tracks of 'em down thar. So what's ther meanin'?"

At intervals he snored softly, to make Morgan think he had fallen asleep.

But nothing happened, except that finally Morgan extinguished his light, and seemed to have retired to the one bed in the lower room.

Fifteen minutes after that Morgan's snore came up to the watchful borderman.

"Breathin' through his nose like er chokin' pig; wonder ef et is fer my benefit?"

But Morgan seemed to have fallen asleep; at the end of an hour he had not stirred, and that choking snore went on at intervals.

"I reckon I has got a plum' onhealthy imagination, thet sees an' hears things when thar ain't none round. Buffler says thet is why I sees whiskizos now and then, an' he don't; an' bercause of et he makes out thar ain't no whiskizos, when I knows better, havin' seen 'em."

His thoughts turned to the Indian tracks he had discovered down by the willows, and to other Indian tracks he had seen on the way.

He recalled the red arrow found beside the river; placed there by Buffalo Killer Sioux to notify Indians of other tribes passing up and down the stream that an Indian war against the white men impended. Nomad had destroyed the arrow.

But, most of all, he worried over the fact that he had not found the young man and his sister whom he had trailed so far. He had intended to induce them to make haste for Ogallala, if he could.

When another hour had passed without anything doing, Nomad's imaginative fire burned itself out, and he began to feel foolish over his fears, and sleepy.

Dropping into a doze, he awoke with a start, sure he had heard the ladder creak; almost before he knew it he was sitting bolt upright in bed, with his revolver trained on the trapdoor.

"Gallop in' gallinippers, war thet imagination, too?"

Sweat had broken out on his body.

For five minutes he sat staring at the hole in the floor, which was now but a black spot, then, hearing nothing, he got out of bed softly and slipped over to the hole.

But the room below was so dark that when he looked down he could see nothing. He tried to fancy he beheld a man clinging to the ladder, but he feared to speak to him, lest he should find himself mistaken, and at last crept back to the bed.

"This sing'lar imagination thet I harbors under my headpiece is shore workin' overtime ter-night," he grumbled, as he disposed himself on the cot. "I war jes' dreamin', and skeered myself inter a fit. Fer an ole man thet has shuck hands wi' danger as much as I has et is plum' reedic'us. Et's proof thet old age is berginnin' ter tell on me, an' I'd better hive up in er

town hyarafter, whar sneak thieves an' mangy dawgs is all ye need ter be afraid of."

Nevertheless, he remained awake another hour.

Ashamed of his fears, he at last fell asleep, and slept soundly.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PICTURE IN THE MIRAGE.

Pawnee Bill was telling the story of the Black Chief—what he knew of it—while they followed the trail left by Hide-rack, as it wound through the soft ground beside the muddy waters of the Upper Missouri.

Old Nomad had been delegated to investigate the tracks of two horses that had gone in this direction. Expected to return soon to the party, he had been gone so long now that his friends had grown alarmed, had back-tracked to connect with his trail, and were now tracing it out.

It could be seen that he was sticking, so far, to the trail left by the two horses.

Of the riders of those horses, there had been something singular. Jack Brandon and his sister were supposed to have seen left behind at Ogallala, after their request to be made members of Buffalo Bill's party had been turned down, for reasons that seemed adequate.

Yet Little Cayuse had seen two cowboys, whose faces, he said, were those of Brandon and his sister, riding beside the Missouri, and heading into Sioux territory. Cayuse had been sprawled in some willows, and they had passed so close to him that he had heard them talking, though he had not understood what was said.

As if to prove that the Piute was right in his assertion, in following up the tracks he pointed out a handkerchief had been found, of a kind that would never have been used by a cowboy; it was small, with a lace edge, and had in a corner the initials, L. B.

"Louise Brandon," interpreted the scout, when he saw the initials.

In addition, at a spring where the two "cowboys" had stopped, boot tracks in the soil showed that the wearer had a foot so small that it could hardly have belonged to a man of the cowboy type.

So Nomad had been deputed to investigate.

To all appearances he was still investigating; yet he had been so long about it that his friends were also now investigating—to learn why he tarried.

Still, they had no great fears for Nomad; he was usually abundantly able to take care of himself under all circumstances. They wanted to know what he had done, or discovered, before they pushed on toward the village of the Buffalo Killers, which was their destination.

As said, Pawnee Bill was telling what he knew about the Black Chief, while they trailed along in the wake of old Nomad.

"Whether he is a negro, or just a very dark Indian, is something I don't know," he confessed, "and the



strange thing about him is that no one seems to know—no white man. The Buffalo Killers have kept to themselves pretty well, and, as they haven't come recently into collision with the whites, they have been pretty much let alone.

"But this is what I heard: He appeared among the Buffalo Killer Sioux a number of years ago, which shows that he was not originally one of them. There was an epidemic of smallpox raging among them when he came, and he had some remedy which he used. Or it may be that he merely taught them a few common-sense things—such as stopping them from jumping into the river when the fever was on them; that had been their practice, to cool the fever, and, as a result, they had been dying like poisoned flies. However it was, he made good; and they liked him so well on account of it that they made him their chief. The old chief, and every one in line for his place, had been killed off by the disease; and, of course, that helped the new man's promotion.

"Another thing I heard is that he has always urged peace with the white men; but recently he has been sick, and a young chief has taken the reins of power, as a result of which this present trouble has been kicked up."

"Anodder t'ing—vot I heardt," said the baron, "iss dot dhis Plack Chief he tond't sday at home so very mooch; he iss go away py himselluf, hoondt'ing unt fishing unt der likes. Budt I tond't know oof idt is so."

"I'm confessing," said Pawnee, "that I don't know if any of it is so; those who were good enough to pour this narrative in my shell-pink ears were strong on fancy and shy of fact; I discovered that. They had heard it of some Indians, who had heard it of other Indians, and they had heard it of still other Indians. So, I have my doubts if there is a Black Chief."

"Vare dare iss some schmoke dare iss chin'rally some fires," urged the baron.

"If there is a Black Chief he is probably only an Indian with a darker complexion than is usually seen," was the guess of Buffalo Bill. "I have seen pure-blooded Indians who were nearly as black as negroes."

"But not often among the Sioux, necarnis," said Pawnee.

"No; generally in the Southwest—Apaches, or other Indians down that way. I think when we find this Black Chief there will be no mystery about him."

The trail they followed brought them up the slope of a hill, and when they gained the top they beheld Morgan's cabin, nestling beside the river.

"Hello!" said the great scout, pulling in Bear Paw suddenly; "I had no idea there was a house here."

"Built there by some trapper, who didn't want his Indian neighbors to know he was occupying that beauty spot," guessed Pawnee; "these hills, and the high willows on each side, make the finest screen you can think about."

"He iss gone away, iss my guessing," commented the baron, for the door of the cabin was closed, and the one window was down.

Buffalo Bill's searching eyes wandered to the stable. The stable door was closed.

"There's a horse in there," he said.

Through the small square, serving as a stable window, he had seen the flicking of a horse's tail.

So they rode to the stable first, with their eyes fixed on the house, too.

Reining up by the stable window, Pawnee looked in; then he whistled an exclamation.

"Old Hide-rack," he said, "and some other caballos doing the friendly act here together; all three eating out of one manger."

When he had looked closer he called to Cayuse.

"Slip your eyes over those caballos beyond Hide-rack," he requested, "and tell me if you ever saw them before."

One look was enough.

"Cowboys' caballos," he said.

They rode on to the little cabin and called before the door.

When no one answered Buffalo Bill swung down and hammered on it with his knuckles, but he got no response.

"Not at home," he said.

He glanced about, and at the ground under his feet, where the grass had been trodden out. Then he looked farther along.

"Moccasin tracks here," he pointed out; "still——"

Little Cayuse dived from the back of Navi, and began to investigate the moccasin tracks; they led him round the corner of the cabin and toward the river.

"Being in Sioux country, with the war talk we've heard," said Pawnee, "makes us shy, when we see moccasin tracks; yet we've no ground for it here—yet."

"None at all," the scout assented.

They remained by the cabin door, talking, while the Piute looked over the moccasin tracks, which took him fifteen minutes or more.

"Heap plenty tracks," he reported when he came back; "many Sioux."

A dozen Sioux, he believed, had been at the cabin, and had gone away by boat; he had seen where the keel of the boat had cut the sand. Other Sioux, as many more, had been down in the willows, and those Sioux had been mounted, for on the banks higher up there were tracks of caballos.

He had found no tracks made by Nomad, and none made by the riders of the two bronchos in the stable now with Hide-rack. But he had found, down where the boat had been, tracks of two white men.

Buffalo Bill, with Pawnee and the baron, went down there, to look at those tracks. Apparently the men who had left them had accompanied the Indians in the canoe, though this was not certain, as marks of another boat's keel were found on the other side of the cabin.

Buffalo Bill looked long and attentively at one set of tracks. Then he spoke to Pawnee Bill and called the attention of Cayuse.

"Those were made by a white man's shoes, but was a white man standing in the shoes at the time?"



"Idt iss meppysso peen an Inchun, huh?" asked the baron.

"Not an Indian, and not a white man," said the scout.

"Himmel! Vot iss?"

"I think a negro stood in those shoes. If a white man, or an Indian, he had a flat foot, like a negro's; there was no arch to his instep, and his flat foot had flattened out the shoe."

"You're right about that, necarnis," Pawnee admitted.

Cayuse began to search for more of those peculiar shoe tracks and found them, at the other corner of the cabin, where the keel of the other boat had scraped the sand.

"Still, we don't get on," said Pawnee. "I know you're thinking of the Black Chief, just as I am; but one swallow doesn't make a summer. Sometimes, though," he added, "if it's the right kind of a swallow it may make a man drunk, and I admit that I'm beginning to be dizzy."

"Oldt Nomadt he iss peen here," said the baron, "unt now he iss nit. Dose odder beople also-o unt likewise. Unt so der Inchuns. Der gonclusion vot I am goncluding iss dot der Inchuns haf cabtured all oof dhem unt haf gone away mit 'em. Oof nodt, vot?"

"Before we do any more concluding," said the scout, "we'd better look inside the house."

Usually, in the borderland of the West, at the time of this story, it was the custom to leave a house unlocked when the occupant was out, so that any one passing, in need of food or shelter, might be able to enter readily and help himself.

But Morgan's cabin was locked.

The door was easily forced, however, and the cabin was entered, the scout and his companion feeling now justified in making this invasion in search of light.

The interior showed no such confusion as could have been expected if Indians had attacked and dragged off the occupants, though it was untidy enough.

Attracted by the long box by the wall, Buffalo Bill lifted the lid, and uttered an exclamation.

"Jumping cats," he said, as he looked at the hideous effigy, "what is this?"

"Himmel!" gasped the German, when he took a look. "Vhen I vake oop in my sleebe I shall now be ridting der nighdtmare."

Little Cayuse, after flinging it a glance, bolted for the open door, and got outside as quickly as he could.

"I'm gambling nothing to something that the owner of this shack made it and thought he could use it to scare Indians with," was Pawnee's guess.

As the box held nothing else, they did not look further there, but placed the hideous image back in it, and closed down the lid.

"Mit it oudt oof sighdt I am feeling petter," the baron admitted; "I couldt scare myselluf away py yoost looking at idt."

"Now for the upstairs," said the scout, when the lower room had been searched.

He mounted by the narrow ladder and the trapdoor to the room above, finding it a tiny place, with only a barred hole in the wall admitting light and air. It held a low bed, and some skin cots on the floor by the walls, with two chairs and a few other things.

This upper room seemed an unfruitful field, and they did not tarry in it long.

Having searched the house, they closed the door behind them, and went out to the stable, which they looked over thoroughly.

Hide-rack whinnied his recognition, and received their attention.

"No one in the house, no one in the stable; and Indians have been here," said Pawnee; "still, there is no indication that the Indians did any damage, or carried any one off. It begins to look to the man up the tree as if Nomad had gone away on foot to search for some trail, or something of the kind, and hadn't got back. Somebody else make a guess; I don't want the monopoly."

They made all sorts of guesses as they mounted and started off for the river bottoms below the cabin, where the Sioux moccasin tracks were reported thickest.

As they went they half circled, and came out on top of the ridge, where they had before them, stretching southward, a level plain whose horizon was bounded only by distance.

Here were tracks, and they dismounted to study them.

The time was early forenoon, the air was still and cool, the horizon limitless as the sea; but afar off on the plains were misty effects, like heat shimmers, where blue lakelets came into existence and vanished again, the effects of mirage.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill, glancing off over the plains, uttered an exclamation.

"Look!" he said.

When they looked they saw an island assume shape in one of the lakelets and men moving there, all cloud-like and strange; then a picture showed, like a tableau.

The picture became a moving one, with men rushing to and fro.

"Inchuns!" gasped the baron.

"Sioux," said the scout.

"And a white man!" cried Pawnee; "a white man—and, yes—look again, necarnis—old Nomad!"

The blue distance blurred like a pictured canvas moved by a wind, then settled again, and cleared, so that everything stood out distinctly. There could be no doubting the evidence of their eyesight.

Plainly seen in the mirage were the Sioux, dancing round old Nomad.

"Himmel!" the baron gasped.

Buffalo Bill looked at the sun, at the sky, held up a moistened forefinger, to test the direction of the wind; then looked again at the mirage.

"Where do you say that thing is happening, Pawnee?" he asked.

"Vare ve are seeing idt," answered the baron.

"Not necessarily, for we are not seeing the thing



itself, but only a mirrored reflection of the real thing."

"Yedt idt iss habbening," said the German, his voice a-tremble.

"Not a doubt of that, Schnitz," admitted Pawnee; "the Sioux have got old Nomad, so it's useless to search for his trail here any longer. We can't understand it right now—but that is the fact."

"Unt ve are a helblessness rightd here!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BARON AND THE EFFIGY.

The mirage lasted but a minute or so, then it faded away, and only the blank horizon stared back at them.

The anxiety of Buffalo Bill and his friends led them to desire instant action; yet, being in a quandary, they hesitated.

Buffalo Bill made the decision at last.

"As we can't tell where that took place," he said, "I think we had better ride hard in the direction in which we saw it, for often a mirage, out here, is merely a hazy-appearing view of something happening right at that point. I have often seen trees thrown up, as it were, in that way, and cattle, and the like, and found out that they were right at the spot where they seemed to be. In such cases I suppose I didn't see true mirages—not in the usual sense, yet they were reflections of actual things, on low-lying air strata just over them."

As nothing was to be gained by remaining at the cabin, apparently, it was determined to set out at once.

"Yet I'm going to ask the baron," said the scout, "to remain here. That fellow—the occupant of the cabin—may come back, and something may be got out of him."

The baron wanted to object—he wanted to be in the thundering head of the party galloping to the relief of old Nomad; in fact, inaction was the baron's bane, yet he subdued this desire.

"My dear baron," said Pawnee, "I know how you feel about this, yet I think Cody is right—some one ought to stay. 'They also serve, who only stand and wait.'"

If they had but known it, Schnitzenhauser was to have the strangest adventures of them all; in the cabin itself, and afterward.

"We'll take Hide-rack," said the scout.

"Right-o!" Pawnee agreed. "We're going to find Nomad, and we're going to rescue him, and he will need Hide-rack."

The baron watched them gallop out of sight across the level plains. Then he squatted down before the door of the cabin, turned his mule loose to graze, and got out his pipe.

It was a big-bowled, jointed-stemmed affair, of German make, and the baron killed a good deal of time putting it together, blowing through the stem to make sure that it would "work," thumbing down his tobacco, and lighting it.

"Ve can serve also somedimes meppysso," he gurgled into the stem of the pipe, "when ve schmoke unt vait; so ve vill yoost schmoke."

For an hour he smoked and thought, watching the hills and the lowlands by the river, while Toofer buried his nose in the grass.

"I am knowing vot Cody vill be doing," he said, "oof when he arrifes py dot mirage idt iss nodd peen dhere, he vill go on py der Inchun willage off dose Sioux, unt I am lefdd here mit ter sack to holdt, I pedt you. Oh, vell, vot iss der usefulness oof porrowing dot trouple?"

Finally growing tired, he unjointed the stem of his pipe, stowed it in his capacious pocket, along with his plethoric bag of tobacco, and went into the cabin, leaving the mule still grazing.

"Idt iss nodd so hot in here," he muttered.

He strolled round the cabin, looking at its few belongings, then he took a look at the hideous figure in the long box by the wall.

"Idt iss enough to skeer der shickens!" he said. "Oof I am an Inchun unt I seen dot, I vouldt be running yedt."

He replaced the effigy, closed the box, and looked further.

Then he went upstairs, and looked that room over again.

When hunger warned him that he needed something to eat he got food out of his war bag, attached to the saddle.

Up to that time he had left the saddle and bridle on the mule, to be ready for an emergency; but his sympathy for the animal induced him to remove them now.

"You are going to sday close py der capin roundt," he said to the mule, when he had stowed them beside the cabin door, "so dot oof you vandt me kvick I can giddt you."

Occasionally, throughout the long afternoon, the baron broke the monotony of his waiting by climbing to the top of the hill before the cabin and looking off across the plains, and now and then he tramped round the cabin and took a survey of the river, as far as he could see it.

"Ach, idt iss der lonesomeness!" he grumbled.

He had determined to remain in and near the cabin until dark, when, if by that time Buffalo Bill had not returned, he meant to camp out in the hills, well beyond the cabin, but where he could watch it, to see if a light appeared in the window.

With this resolve in mind, he sat down again in the cabin when the afternoon was well advanced, and then fell asleep, for the day was hot and he felt drowsy.

It was nearly sundown when he awoke.

"Yiminy," he said, "dit I vake me oop because I am hearing somet'ing, or oddervise?"

The feeling was strong on him that he had heard voices, so he made his way toward the open door.

As soon as he had taken a look he jumped back.

A dozen or more Sioux warriors were in front of the cabin and had captured Toofer, and they now



barred his way, so that he could not get out without being seen by them, and a foot race with a bullet was not to the baron's liking. Likewise he had no desire for a fight with that many armed redskins.

Looking round like a trapped rat, he saw the long box by the wall.

His examinations of the cabin had informed him that the front door and window offered the only methods of exit.

"Idt iss der box in for me," he whispered. "Oof dhey come in unt oben idt I vill yoost push oop dot veller vot iss in der box, unt der Inchuns vill be running like some houses on fire."

It seemed so brilliant an idea that the baron could not repress a chuckle, in spite of the fright into which he had been thrown.

So he opened the box, threw himself heavily down on the effigy, and drew the lid down on top of him.

"Oof I tond't smodher me— Ach! Vot iss?"

His hurled weight was causing the bottom of the box to descend with him.

Frightened more by that than he had been by the Indians, the baron tried to throw back the lid and scramble out, but his descent was too rapid; he dropped through the hole that had opened below him, clutching in his panic the image that dropped through with him.

As he did so he struck against a cross beam, that seemed to break him in two; and, still clinging to the effigy, struck in the water and went under.

When he came up he was swimming and blowing like a porpoise, and was in semidarkness.

There was some cork in the image, apparently, for it was buoyant; a discovery which made the baron clutch it the tighter as the muddy current, whirling in an eddy under the overhang of the cabin, pulled him down again.

As the stream swept him out into the sunlight, which was fading on the face of the river, he heard the Indians in the house.

"Ach!" he sputtered. "Oof dhey seen me now I am a gonest. Unt Toofer—dhey haf got my peautiful moo-el!"

He sank into the water and tried to turn the image, so that if it should be seen by the redskins they would not guess what it was, and let the current carry him along.

The Indians, searching first for liquor, did not see him, and he was soon down by the willows.

Here he drove himself ashore with a few vigorous kicks, drew the effigy up beside him, and sank down, with the willows for a screen.

"Dot iss go aheadt oof me," he panted; "but I am safe already yedt! Meppys der man vot vaidts unt der man vot schmokes, iss serfing; but der mans vot iss go to sleeb by his post on—he should gidt idt in der necks kvick, unt dot iss me, Schnitzenhauser."

He heard the Indians talking and yelling while they ransacked for the whisky they supposed was in the cabin.

They kept up the racket until dark, then they rode

away, but whether they had secured anything the watcher in the willows did not know.

He was about to crawl out and make his way to the cabin when he was dissuaded by a canoe, that passed him, pulled by two men, as he judged by their voices.

"Oof vun he aind't a nigger he is sbeak like idt. Unt now he iss singing."

Though the voice was low, it was rather musical, and the words came to him distinctly:

"Says de coon tuh de possum, 'way up in de 'simmon tree,  
'Misteh Possum, you had betteh come down!'  
Says de possum tuh de coon, 'Is you speakin' tuh me?  
'Den you betteh keep yo' footses on de groun'."

"Oh, shet up!" the voice of a white man grumbled. "Thar may be inimies round hyar, fer all we know."

The singing voice stopped, and the canoe vanished in the direction of the cabin.

"Idt iss a white man unt a nigger," muttered the baron; "now vot iss der meanness?"

He heard them getting out of the canoe by the cabin; and a little later heard them in the cabin. Then a light flashed from the front window.

It was apparent that excitement reigned in the cabin. He heard the voices in loud grumbling, and heavy feet thumping hurriedly over the boards of the floor. One of the men ran outside and came round the corner of the cabin.

When he went back, the sounds of excitement continued.

"I vouldt be gifing all der peer vot I trinkt lasdt monnth oof I could slib oop by der cabin now unt hear vot iss der matter, but I am guessing dot dhey are findting oudt der box iss losdt idtselluf, mit der Inchun skeerer vot vos in idt; unt dot der door he iss been busted unt somepoty has been by der house in. Yaw, idt iss a skinch dot I am right."

Later he heard voices by the river; they seemed to be under the overhang; then the dip of a paddle coming his way.

"Coming to hundert vor der image vot iss missing," he thought, and drew himself higher up on the bank.

The canoe passed him, the occupants talking in a low grumble, went on down the stream, and later came back, the men in the canoe still talking.

Then the light flashed out in the cabin again, and he heard them rummaging there.

"Dose Inchuns half taken away mine peautiful moo-el, so vot iss der uses oof sdaying by dhis blace in any longer? Oof idt shouldt come to a fighting, mine bistol iss vet as water, unt mine ca'tritches unt me—I couldn't do notting. So I am going to gidt me away while I am aple."

He waded out into the stream, pushing the image before him, then he clung to it and floated downstream.

"I vill yoost keeb idt," he thought, "vor oof I am meedting oop mit some retskins meppys I can make idt oof some usefulness. Yaw, idt iss a goot itea. Budt as vor meerting mit Cody again, idt iss nodd a fine brospect, vor here I am breaking my drail by



sdicking to der vater. Yoost der same, I am breaking idt vor any odder vellers vot may vandt to voller me. Yaw, I am having many pright iteas py my prain in."

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE BRANDONS AGAIN.

The baron got ashore at last, wet as water could make him.

There was here another growth of willows, in a bend of the river, and he burrowed into them, seeking higher ground. The effigy he carried in his arms as he waded shoreward.

On the higher ground the baron camped without fire, in a miserably wet and uncomfortable condition. More than half his misery was created, however, by the fact that he could not smoke; his "water-proof" tobacco pouch had not stood up under the hard conditions imposed on it, and in his "water-proof" match box his matches had been soaked and ruined. And he was without food, as well as out of tobacco.

"Donnervetter!" he grumbled. "Der luckiness oof Schnitzenhauser she haf deserted me. I am here, budt I tond't know vare idt iss, unt I am so soaked mit vetness dot I vond't needt to trink any vater for a moonndth."

In the high altitudes of the plains the nights are nearly always cool, even when the days have been blazing hot, and a cool night wind now sweeping across the river set the baron to chattering his teeth and shivering his rotund body.

"Idt iss better to be der image," he reflected, laying his hand on the effigy; "he iss off a vetness like mine-selluf, budt he tond't know idt, so idt iss nodd hurt-ing him; I am vishing I vos a fishes, or some frogs, or anything budt Schnitzenhauser righdt now, I pedt you!"

When he removed his coat and shirt, thinking to dry them by hanging them on a willow, the night wind made him hustle into them again.

It was midnight before the baron found relief in sleep.

He did not awake until the sun was well above the willows and burning down on him. It had dried his clothing. But he was still uncomfortable and unhappy, the very opposite of the optimistic Schnitzenhauser familiar to the readers of these stories.

His position was perilous on the exposed river bank, yet he did not want to crawl back into the ooze beyond the willows. He stood up and looked about, feeling his stiffened clothing contracting and scratching unpleasantly.

"I am sheated eferyvare," he grumbled, groaning with pain. He felt now, even more than before, the pain of the wrenching blow he had received in his fall out of the house. "My match box unt my topacco box iss schnides, unt my clodthing idt iss likewise; der man vot I pought dhis suidt of he iss dell me idt vill nodd

shrink oof I dake care oof idt, unt now you look at idt, idt iss too smaller for me py twice!"

Leaving the still wet image on the ground, he walked to the top of the nearest rise.

When he poked his Teutonic nose over it he was given a stunning surprise. A man rose up behind a detached willow clump and pointed a revolver at him.

With a squawk the baron dropped back, drew his revolver, and began to crawl.

But he heard the man running, and saw him again in a moment at the top of the rise, still pointing the revolver.

"Halt, there!" came the command.

Schnitzenhauser dropped to a sitting posture with a bump, and lifted his own weapon.

"You pudt idt town," he said, "unt tond't make some more foolishness py me!"

Then he opened his eyes wider in recognition; he had seen this man before, in Ogallala.

"Ve are bot' knowing us," he announced, in a tone of conviction, "so vot iss der usefulness of shoodd-ing? I haf seen you pefore."

The young man dropped his pistol arm.

"And I have seen you; you are the man they call Baron Schnitzenhauser!"

"Paron von Schnitzenhauser," the German corrected; "yaw, I am me!"

The young man turned, and beckoned to some one behind him.

"You are of Cody's party," he said to the baron; "where is he?"

"When you ask me vot I tond't know, how can I say idt?"

"You don't know where he is? That is bad."

"You pedt me, I am ackvainted mit dot fact yet already; he is go away yesterday, unt he tond't come pack some more dimes; idt iss py der cabin oop der rifer."

The baron was struggling to get to his knees.

Another figure, clad in cowboy clothing that showed abundant signs that it had seen a thorough soaking, appeared on the rise. The baron rubbed his eyes.

"Idt iss your sisder—not?"

"It is my sister."

The girl in cowboy clothing came forward. She, too, swung a revolver, which made her look as war-like as her brother. By the time she came up to him, with her brother, the baron was on his feet, ready to greet them.

"Ve vos voller you unt Nomadt," he explained; "unt ve tond't cand't findt neidher oof you; unt Cody he iss sdill oudt."

"Hunting for us?"

"For Nomadt. Der Inchuns haf goppled him in. Ve tidn't seen idt, budt ve seen der bicture oof idt."

The girl stared.

"In der sky line."

He had some difficulty in making them understand that they had seen the capture of the borderman in a mirage.



"We have had some startling and strange experiences," said Jack Brandon.

"Unt my inexperience haf been oof der same stuffin's; I am pooty nigh deadt."

"You say you were at that cabin up the river."

"Yaw."

"Well, we were, and an attempt was made there to murder us."

He glanced up the river.

"Is it safe to talk here?" he asked.

"No blace iss oof a safeness here, budt oof ve hite in der villers idt vill be petter, aber idt iss some mud panks."

"We prefer the mud to danger," said Brandon.

"Nothing can make us look more like frights than we are," Louise Brandon added.

"Better to be frights than frightened," added Jack Brandon, and started down the slope.

At the edge of the willows he brought up with a cry.

"What is it?" she asked, startled.

"A What-is-it!"

He had come suddenly on the effigy lying on its back with its goggle eyes staring at the sky.

"Dot is der life breserfer," explained the baron; "twice idt haf safed my life, vonce vhen I am hiting py der box in, unt der second dime vhen idt iss my life breserfer in der vater. Unt idt vill skeer retskins. Der usefulness oof dot iss vort' money."

The girl came up, with the baron, and looked at the horrible thing.

"I should think it would scare anything," she declared.

"Yaw; idt iss skeer me, der fairst dime I seen idt."

"Where did you get it?" Jack Brandon inquired.

"I haf saidt py der box oof der cabin in, vhen I fall t'rough der hole vot iss der pottom oof der box, unt preak me indo twice bieces. Ach! I am veeling idt yedt."

He pressed his hands to his rotund stomach.

"I am hidt somet'ing vhen I fall."

The brother and sister looked startled, also interested.

"You weren't in that little room upstairs?"

"I am py der box in."

"Let's get down into the bushes, where we can talk; this is——"

Brandon plunged on without finishing, the girl following him, and the baron came after, carrying the effigy in his arms.

"I shall name idt Life Breserfer," he said, "vor idt iss."

"Tell us about it," was the invitation, when they were under cover of the willows.

The baron explained volubly, and finally made them understand just what had happened to him.

"That house is a death trap," said Jack Brandon; "we already knew it, and here is added proof. Now,

I am going to tell you what happened to my sister and me."

"Vaidt dill I dake some looks," said the baron.

He climbed to the higher ground, looked round, and came back.

"Der coasting iss clear," he announced; "so you can go aheadt mit your dog tail."

The girl laughed.

"Dot iss vot Nomadt call idt, vhen he iss sdart oudt to dell some story. Ach, I am vishing I knowed vare oldt Nomadt iss py now!"

"We went to the house up there and met a man who said his name was Morgan. He let us put our animals in his stable, and he gave us food and offered us a place to sleep in. It was a little upstairs room."

"Yaw, I haf seen idt; idt iss apoudt half as big."

"It was small, and had for a window only a barred opening. But as you have seen it I don't need to explain about that. We didn't like to sleep in it, but as it was the only place the man had to offer, we thought we would, for we had been sleeping out, and I was afraid my sister would take cold. So she took the little bed, and I curled up on the floor.

"She awoke me soon by a frightened cry. As I jumped up I saw that the little bed had tilted suddenly, and she was sliding into a hole that had opened in the floor. When I jumped to help her I went into that hole, too."

The girl shuddered and put her hand over her eyes.

"We fell into water, clutching each other, and, of course, went under. Half of the house, you know, hangs over the water, and that hole had dropped us through into the river.

"It would have been the end of us, if I hadn't been a good swimmer; at home I am known as the best swimmer in the country—a regular water dog. So, when I came up, still holding on to my sister, I began to swim. The current caught us, and we were soon out in the river.

"The stars were shining, but it was dark. It was by the starlight coming in through the barred window, I forgot to say, that I saw the bed tipping and my sister falling. I could just make out the outline of the cabin, and I thought I heard the man in the house run out of it by way of the door.

"Then my sister pulled me under, and I had a hard fight. But I managed to keep her head out of the water most of the time, and finally I got ashore with her, on the other side of the river.

"There we hid. And there, after a while, I left her. Our horses were in the stable, and I was determined to get them; and I admit that I had murderous thoughts against the man who had tried to kill us.

"So I went upstream, and started to swim across. When I was near the cabin a canoe came up and was right on top of me almost before I knew it was there. Whoever was in it was dipping a soft paddle.

"Believing it was the scoundrel who had tried to kill



us, I tried to get at him; I caught hold of the gunwale of the boat and shot him into the water and made a grab for him as he went down. I got him by a leg, and we had a fight right there in the water; but he got away and got back to his canoe. But I had discovered that he was not Morgan, but a negro, and I let him go.

"After that I swam ashore above the cabin, and lay there on the bank a good while. I couldn't tell if the negro had gone into the cabin, nor if Morgan was at home. But he had told me he had a negro servant, so I knew that the chances would be against me if I tried to get into the cabin and had to tackle both of them.

"I was about to climb up and go to the stable when I heard Morgan and the negro talking under the overhang of the cabin. I couldn't understand what they said, but when they had gone I floated down under that overhang and tried to discover what sort of murder trap they had there, though I had some ideas along that line before, as you know.

"I was under there when the negro came in again in the canoe, and flashed a torch. He didn't see me, for he was looking at something over his head. When he stood up to look I was tempted to kick the canoe from under him, but I didn't, for I wanted to discover what he was doing there.

"What I discovered—and that was by what he said, rather than by what I saw—was that under the hole which had dropped my sister and me into the water, a beam had been in position with some kind of knife or scythe fixed to it that would cut any one in two that struck it."

"Ouch!" whispered the baron. "I am hitting a beam like dot myselluf, aber idt hadt nodd a knife. Dot iss vhy I haf got so many bains now. Yaw, I am as full oof banes as a vinder. Budt go aheadt."

"That beam was out of place, that is why we had not struck it in our fall. I heard the negro say it must be fixed right off."

"Der imbudence oof him!"

"Morgan tried to kill us—there is no doubt about it. But—why?"

"Ask me somedings dot haf more oof an easiness."

"He didn't know that you were in that box, so——"

"Budt I knowed idt!"

"So we can't say that he planned to kill you; he didn't even know that you and your pards were at the house. But he did deliberately plan to kill my sister and me."

"Unt Nomadt, I pedt you! Aber ve haf nodd der broof oof dot yidt."

"I couldn't get our horses, for Morgan and the negro were both in the stable when I got out of the river again. And as I had been so long away from my sister I gave it up."

"Unt you hafent peen py der capin since?"

"No. But I intended to make a try again to get our horses to-day. We saw Indians up there yesterday.

Of course, if they're still around, we won't go near the place."

The baron went up to the higher ground and took another look.

"Ve haf to keeb some vatches," he said.

"What do you intend to do?" Brandon asked.

"Gidt me somet'ings to eadt, der fairst t'ing, oof I can, unt vatch vor der coming oof Cody unt der odders, unt also-o keeb me oudt oof sighdt."

He pondered, and found it hard work to think without his customary allowance of tobacco.

"You haf come oudt here to findt oudt apoudt your fader?"

"Yes; and because Cody wouldn't let us accompany him we came alone."

The baron shook his head.

"Der foolishness oof idt iss past peliefing. Der Inchuns vill gidt you, unt dhey vill gedt your sisder—which iss vorse. Petter you go hidt der pack dracks right away kvick."

"The Indians are not on the warpath—we learned that while we were in Ogallala; they are merely dancing in preparation for their annual hunting."

"Somepoty toldt you dot?"

"A man in Ogallala; he said he was sure of it, and that Cody ought to know it was so. In fact, he thought Cody did know it, but felt that he had to go out, and earn his government pay."

"Vot a lie!"

"So we came," said Jack Brandon, setting his jaws firmly, "and here we are!"

"Der fools are nodd all deadt yedt—huh? Oxcuse me vor blain sbeaking. Budt two oof 'em iss going to be deadt, oof dhey tond't gidt pack to Ogallala."

"And you?"

"Dot iss tifferendt; dot man say I am here vor my gofermendt bay—unt I haf to earn idt. Yaw; I haf peen earning idt. I pedt you! Unt I vill earn idt again some more pefore dhis pitzness iss ofer. Dot iss der troot'."

"We have been thinking," said Brandon, "that now that we are out in this section Buffalo Bill would be willing to have us join him for protection, so that we could get a look-in on the Indian village, and make some investigations. As I told Cody, when I talked with him in Ogallala, we have had information leading us to believe that our father was not killed out here—did not die out here—but fell into the hands of the Buffalo Killer Sioux. We intend to find out about that."

"Dot vos a long dimes ago," urged the baron. "Do you t'ink he vould still py dhis dime be mit dhem Inchuns?"

"We intend to find out, I said."

"Vhen you know dot you vill be getting readty to go deadt, vare you vill know notting."

But the Brandons would not be persuaded.

"All right," said the baron. "Budt oof you are killed, tond't blame me vor idt aftervard."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE CAPTURE OF THE BRANDONS.

While they waited, uncertain what to do, but still continuing their talk, the baron investigated the inner workings of the effigy.

He had been astonished to find a whistle in its mouth, for one thing, and was looking farther. Then he discovered that a rubber tube ran inside the right leg, from the foot through the body, and connected with the whistle. When the baron blew into this tube the image sent forth a startling blast.

The baron dropped the effigy and rolled backward.

"Yumpin' yack rappits!" he panted. "Dit you heardt dot?"

"I'm afraid it was heard by some one who oughtn't to have heard it," said Jack Brandon gravely. "Don't do it again."

"Me? Dot vos nodd me. Idt vos him!"

"Don't blow into the tube again; that's what I mean."

"You pedt me nodd."

He looked at the effigy, sprawled on its back in the willows.

"That would be a good scarecrow for a corn field," the girl observed.

"A scare Inchun vor der brairie—iss idt nodd? Unt dot iss petter."

He renewed his investigations and found wires inside the coat sleeves and up the legs; but he did not understand what they were to be used for.

Jack Brandon visited the rise again, and, coming back, reported that nothing was doing.

He had hardly done so, however, when the baron, looking out on the river, sighted the canoe.

"In der wrong tirection you haf been looking," he whispered, and pointed to it.

The canoe held two men—Morgan and the negro; and, as they paddled downstream, they looked at the shores.

To keep from being seen the Brandons and the baron crouched in the willows; but they could see the canoe and its occupants. Also, when the canoe drew near they could hear the men talking.

The negro was hilarious and wanted to sing, and it was apparent that he had been drinking. Morgan reprimanded him and warned him of danger. The white man was in an angry and belligerent mood and was berating the Indians, who had come to his cabin and stolen his whisky, so it appeared.

"They got ever' one o' them cases in the fust cache inside the house," he said, "and they took away ole Moloch. That heats me, for I'd swore nary Injun in a hundred miles would tech him, er go nigh him; so long's he was gyardin' the cabin I felt safe to go off and leave it. But they even took him."

"Ole Molick mus' 'a' been drinkin', too, boss," said the negro, laughing; "dat's why he done los' his grip. Ki-yi!"

"Shet up, you fool!"

"When dey lif' ole Molick out'n de box an' doan' find no whisky bottles un'er him, hit des make 'em so mad dey knock de bottom out'n de box. Ki-yi!"

"I loosened that bottom myself the day after we found out the cross beam under the upstairs room had been moved; fer I thought mebbe so, if I got into a fight with any one, I might want to pitch him an' me into the box and drap through into the river."

"Maybe ole Molick he done drap th'ough heself?"

"He didn't have weight enough to push that bottom down. Still, some red might have pushed him through while pokin' in the box hunting fer whisky. But how a red ever got up courage enough to look into that box, to say nothin' o' pokin' round in it, after seein' him in it, gits me."

"He found dat courage in one o' dem whisky bottles, boss. Ki-yi!"

"That's whar you found your present foolishness, too."

"Yaas, boss; I reckon dat so. Yo' kin fin' mos' anything in one o' dem bottles. When you done drink up de whisky in 'em you can see mos' anything, too. One time I seen an Injun wid two heads, an' a green snake what had two tails. Ki-yi!"

"Don't talk so loud."

"I ain't; I'm des laffin'."

"Then don't laff so loud."

"Kin I sing?"

He started without permission:

"Ride up in de char'yut, sooner in de mawning;  
Ride up in de char'yut, sooner in de mawning;  
Ride up in de char'yut, sooner in de mawning;  
I hope I'll jine de band."

"You'll jine the band o' dead ones," Morgan flung at him, "if you don't quit your foolishness right off."

"Las' time I was in town I was tol' I was a dead one, fo' staying out hyuh. Ki-yi!"

He seemed to become serious.

"Tell yo' what, boss; if dem Injuns ain't drunk all de whisky up befo' now I can go out an' git it—what's remainin' of it. Dem redskins does whatever I tells 'em tuh do—you know it, an' I can git it."

"And fall into the hands of Buffalo Bill's crowd! Besides, you couldn't do it. Set the Buffler Killers to dancing, and git 'em drunk, and nobody could do anything with 'em; they're wild men."

"Dey doan' skeer me none, boss; dey sho doan't."

The canoe drifted past the willows and round a bend, and the voices could no longer be heard.

"What do you think of that?" Jack Brandon asked, in a whisper.

"What they said seems to make some things clearer," declared the girl.

The baron tiptoed out of the willows and up the rise.

"I tond't can seen 'em no longer," he reported, returning. "So I now haf an itea. Mine Toofer moo-el



is pack by dot staple in, unt also-o der capallos vot pe-longs py you. Vot iss to keeb us vrom going unt gitting dhem."

"It's a good idea," assented Brandon, "and we'll act on it right now, while they're away."

"Unt py now," added the baron, "Cody he may be coming again, unt I am vandting to seen him."

But when they had left the willows, passed the first low rise, and mounted to the higher ground, their decision changed. A band of Indians was seen riding from northward toward the river.

"Oudt oof sighdt, oudt oof mindt," said the baron, and sprinted back to the willows. "Me—I am notd avraidt oof Inchuns," he explained, when the Brandons joined him, "budt, yoost der sameness, when my bistol is rusdy unt mine ca'tritches has been vetted by der rifer vater, I t'ink idt iss a viseness dot dhey tond't meed't me."

For an hour they remained concealed in the willows, with occasional brief visits to the hilltop to see what the Sioux were doing.

Then it was discovered that the band of Sioux was moving up the river, on the other side.

"Perhaps they want more whisky," surmised Brandon, "and will make another search of the cabin; from what we heard I judge, too, that there is more there."

The Indians, intoxicated, were hilarious; they yelled with much enthusiasm, like boisterous youngsters out for a holiday, and they fired off pistols, wasting much powder and lead. Now and then some of them ran races with their ponies.

Not until they were quite near did the concealed party discover that the negro was with them, apparently leading them, and as noisy as the noisiest. He had mounted a mustang—there was a string of led animals—and looked strangely out of place in the midst of the yelling red warriors.

The Indians went on toward the cabin, and swam their animals across the river when they came up to it.

"Mine Toofer moo-el!" cried the baron. "Oof a ret-skin pudts his handts on you I am hobing dot you vill stuff der kickin's oudt oof him so kvick it vill make his headt svim."

Anxiety about Toofer made him determine to get closer to the cabin.

"Meppyso I cand't do somedings," he admitted, "unt I am t'inking dot I cand't; budt—yoost der same!"

He inspected his rusted revolver and the water-soaked cartridges.

"Der bistol he iss in vorking ordhers," he said; "unt oof der vetness oof der rifer vater dit notd gidt to der bowder in der ca'tritches idt iss all righdt. You vill seen me when I came again. So, goot-pye, unt look a liddle oudt for yoursellefs."

He climbed the bank and disappeared, taking the effigy with him.

Again the baron was playing in luck, when he did not know it.

He spent an hour's time out in the hills beyond the cabin, without seeing anything of Toofer, but hearing the roistering redskins at the cabin, and was back-tracking, in a disgusted frame of mind, when he heard sudden shooting in the direction of the willows.

"Vot iss!" he whispered, and slid to the top of the nearest knoll.

Lying flat there, and looking down at the willows, he discovered that another band of Sioux, advancing up the river on his side, had made a descent into the willows, and had captured Jack and Louise Brandon.

"Dot iss a shame!" he panted.

Evidently he and the Brandons had left tracks in going to and from the hilltop, and those tracks had been seen by the keen-eyed redskins.

As far as he could determine at that distance, though there had been shooting, no one had been hurt.

This second band of Buffalo Killer Sioux came on toward the cabin with their prisoners, and passed so close to the concealed baron that he could clearly see the painted faces of the braves and the pale features of the prisoners.

"Pravery iss a goot t'ing," he muttered, "budt somedimes idt iss yoost anodder name vor gommitting suicide. Oof dot poy unt girl hadt paidt addention to der advice off Cody idt vouldt notd have been habbening now. Dose retskins haf var baint py dheir faces on, unt idt iss mean trouple for der brisoners. Budt vot can I do, when I am here py my lonesomeness?"

From his hidden position, but ready to retreat, the baron watched the Indians at the cabin.

The negro had shown them the second whisky cache, apparently; at any rate, their hilariousness took on the character of a whisky debauch. Some of them became maudlin and helpless, and all were noisy.

When they swam their mustangs across the river, the helpless Indians were roped to the mustangs; those not able to sit up being tied flat to the backs of the animals.

The baron watched them get across and saw them ride away northward.

"Going to der willage," he interpreted. "Himmel! Idt iss a padt pitzness."

He now went in search of Toofer, feeling that the coast was clear; but he did not find the mule, and came at last to the conclusion that the redskins had taken it, though he had not seen Toofer with the Indian mustangs.

"He iss a vise moo-el; so meppyso he iss hite himselluf oudt in der hills."

When he could not find Toofer, and Buffalo Bill's party could not be seen anywhere on the horizon, the baron decided to strike out for the village.

"I vouldt notd pedt efen der hole in a doughnut dot mine shances are goot; sdill—"

He tightened the belt round his ample waist and got ready to swim the river, the effigy in his arms.

After all, there was heroic stuff in the baron.



## CHAPTER IX.

## ON THE BARON'S TRAIL.

When Buffalo Bill's party returned to Morgan's cabin, the baron and the Indians were gone.

Evidences of the Indian carousal were multiplied. The floor had been torn up, the chairs and table broken, the box by the wall smashed, and broken bottles lay all round. Over all was a stench of whisky.

The hole in the floor which the box had concealed being thus disclosed, by its wrecking, led to an examination of the overhang; and this led to a disclosure of the trap in the floor of the little room above, through which an occupant of the small bed could be tumbled. The beam that had been under this was still out of position, and the scythe-blade knife, which had rested on it, was gone; but enough was found to reveal the nature of the death traps that the ingenuity of the occupant had devised.

They were anxious to lay their hands on Morgan now, but he was not there, and he could not be located.

They knew that Nomad had not fallen a victim to the death traps in the house—proof being the mirage picture; but they feared that the Brandons had been victims.

While they were still searching and discussing, the familiar braying of the baron's mule reached them.

They had looked for the mule and the animals of the Brandons, in the stable, without expecting to find them there.

"Heehaw! Heehawick!"

Running out of the cabin, when they heard that, they beheld Toofer, on top of the nearest hill, gazing down at the horses tethered by the door.

"The baron must be near, necarnis," said Pawnee joyfully; "for staying together they are regular Siamese twins—the baron and Toofer."

When Buffalo Bill called to the mule Toofer came down the hill, and was soon rubbing noses with Bear Paw and Chick-Chick and the Piute's pinto.

Little Cayuse scrambled to the top of the hill to look for the baron.

"No can see!" he called back.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee went to the top of the hill and called; then fired off revolvers. But the baron did not appear.

They began to be anxious for the baron's safety, then.

"I'm hoping one of those death traps didn't get Schnitz," remarked Pawnee. "It's a singular thing for him to leave Toofer!"

Little Cayuse got busy on the tracks by the house; but he was presented a perplexing tangle which was too much for even his clever ability. In the end, down by the river, he found tracks that he declared were the baron's; but when the pards looked at them they could not be sure that the Piute was right. The baron made an unmistakable track, unlike that of any other mem-

ber of the party; but here moccasin tracks were so thick that certainty was not possible.

The Piute studied the direction, then he swam the river, and lifted up a whoop on the other side.

When the animals were forced across, with the baron's mule, and the tracks found by the Piute were inspected, other tracks beside them furnished a new puzzle. There were the baron's tracks, sure enough—barefooted and then with his shoes on—and the Piute had been right; but the tracks with them—who could have made those tracks? They were close by a willow.

"The fellow who made those," said Pawnee, "weighed about fifteen pounds, necarnis—at a guess; and he must have been a dead man! Which shows how foolish it is, sometimes, to try to reach a conclusion."

"The effigy!" said the scout.

"Hoop-a-la! I guess you've struck it. We couldn't find the thing in the cabin; so we thought it had fallen through into the river. The question is: Did the baron have it with him, and set it up by that willow? Or had it been there before him—or, perhaps, after him?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; but the tracks were made yesterday—I think. What do you say about it, Cayuse?"

"One sun ago," said the Piute, testing the plasticity of the mud imprints with his fingers.

"That is my guess," agreed the scout; "anyway, we know now that the baron crossed here, and went out upon the plains, with his toes turned in the direction of the Sioux village. And as that is also now our destination, we can do no better than to flutter along in the same way."

They "fluttered," at a rapid gait.

They had not been able to locate the position of Nomad's capture by the Sioux; then had abandoned the attempt. Sure that, unless he had been killed he had been taken to the Sioux village, they were going there now to rescue him, if he lived, and seek the punishment of his murderers, if he had fallen.

"We'll find the Brandons there, too," said Pawnee, "if they're still among the living. What I'm wishing is, that we could get our clutches on that rascal, Morgan; he has been in the whisky business here, incidentally killing any white people who came this way that he feared might make trouble for him. But I wonder if the reds didn't capture him, when they raided his cabin."

"Perhaps we'll find him a prisoner in the Sioux village," the scout conjectured.

For two or three miles out the familiar Missouri River bluffs of that section extended. They were irregular hills, shutting out both front and rear view.

Through them the trail of Indian mustangs passed, and it was believed the baron had dropped into this trail and followed it. At any rate, his tracks could not be seen, and he had entered it.



They were nearing the end of the hilly region, keeping a close lookout to prevent a surprise, when they heard startled Indian yells.

"Something's broke, necarnis," said Pawnee, reining in Chick-Chick.

"Come this way, pronto," said the Piute.

The yells and a clatter of pony hoofs were coming in their direction.

"Down and out of sight," the scout ordered; "we don't want to run into trouble, unless we have to."

They drew their horses into a ravine between tou-seled hills, and waited.

A few minutes later a band of Buffalo Killer Sioux tore past, but well out from them, and went flying toward the plains, lashing their mustangs into frenzied speed.

"Something threw a bad scare into those rascals," was the guess of Pawnee Bill. "I wonder what it was?"

## CHAPTER X.

### LUCKY SCHNITZENHAUSER.

Baron von Schnitzenhauser, who always proclaimed himself a lover of excitement and the strenuous life, had apparently been getting his heart's desire. And still he was not happy, because he could not smoke.

To remedy this he spent a good two hours that day in drying his tobacco. For a drying table he used his coat, which had long since lost its superfluous moisture, spreading the coat on the sand, with the tobacco distributed well over it. The place chosen for this work was a sunny hollow that nestled between Missouri River bluffs.

Incidentally, while drying his tobacco, he gave old Moloch a sunbath. And the old fellow needed it. His interior was soggy—so soggy that water leaked through on the baron's back, when he carried Moloch there.

Drying the tobacco, watched by the staring eyes that seemed to look down on him with peculiar disfavor, the baron talked to Moloch, in lieu of another companion on whom he could unload the tale of his woes.

"Oof Nomadt is killed he iss a deadt vun, unt oof der Prandons haf been killed, dey are two deadt vuns; budt Cody—you cand't kill him! So I am banking on him, unt on Bawnee. Der soonesdt vay to findt Cody iss to go vare dare iss a likeliness dot der danger iss going to be der mosdt, unt dot iss der Inchun willage. So you unt me iss going dare, yoost so soon as I can make me some schmoke. I aind't had notting to eadts since der last dime, but you—you are lucky; you tond't haf to eadt notting. You can starve unt starve, unt still be so fat as yedt. I enfy you. Yaw."

He stirred the tobacco, sifted it through his fingers, and let the sun bake it a while.

He had placed the joints of his pipe stem in the sun,

with the bowl by it, and was superintending their drying at the same time.

"Anodder t'ing vhy ve are going py der Inchun willage iss, dot Toofer, I pedt you, iss dare. Unt meppysso ve can do somet'ings for dose voolish young man unt young voman vot vouldt not sday by dot Ogallala in."

He up-ended Moloch, shook him, to see if his "insides" were still water soaked; then set him up again, propped by a scraggy bush.

"You are so hantsome as I am—nit! Idt vouldt gif me der aboblexy, oof you shouldt look in a looking glass. Der man vot made you vos suffering vrom der telirium tremens."

The baron got his tobacco dried, and most of the moisture out of the interior economy of old Moloch; then he put his pipe together and enjoyed a smoke.

"Oof I haf goot topacco I tond't needt anyt'ing to eadt," he declared to Moloch; "goot topacco is meadt unt trink, unt peer unt saurkraut, unt all der odder goot t'ings. Me—I am feeling petter! Soon I shall be feeling fine. Dhen ve are going on."

The baron, thus rejuvenating himself, did not fail to keep watch against dangers. Now and then he twisted round for a look behind him, and he watched the tops of the hills, and the defiles leading into his camping place.

At last his pipe dropped out of his mouth, and, with a low squawk, like a frightened chicken, he threw himself forward, flat on his face; when he rolled over he was clutching his revolver. Then he squirmed in behind the bush that supported the effigy.

"Inchuns!" he panted. "Oddervise dot topacco, vot I haf been deprifed oof enchoying so long, iss make me see t'ings. He vos sdick his headt oop py dot hilldop."

In his wriggling to get out of sight the baron knocked over Moloch, and did not take the trouble to set the effigy up again. In truth, his discovery so startled him that for the moment he forgot all about his belief in the potency of the image to scare off redskins.

The Indian head did not appear again on top of the hill. But about ten minutes later a number of Sioux warriors rose up in the defile before the baron, prepared to rush him.

The baron had been given time to think, by their delay; so when they came at him he lifted Moloch to a sitting posture before the bush and crouched down behind it.

Then he let his revolver go; and, still having his wits about him, he drew up Moloch's right foot and blew sharply into the tube set in the bottom of it. The shrill whistle, so startling in its quality, broke across the hills.

The baron fired again, wounding one of the charging Sioux.

Then the whole character of the scene changed, as if by magic.



The fall of the warrior, the cracking reports of the baron's revolver, the echoing blast from the whistle, more than all the sight of old Moloch, threw such a fright into the warriors that they abandoned their crafty attempt to capture the white man, and wheeled in panicky flight.

Beyond the hill they had left their ponies, in charge of a couple of braves.

Gaining the ponies, they flung themselves blindly to their backs, and dashed away, quirting the animals into headlong flight.

The baron stood up, holding aloft the hideous image, as he saw them go, and sent after them other shots from his revolver.

"Whoob!" he cried, dancing awkwardly. "Dhis Life Breserfer he iss a skinch—he iss a chewel! Whoob-a-la! I am safed again."

Once more he blew the whistle; once more he fired off his revolver; and his yell of joyful triumph awoke the echoes of the hills.

But the scared Sioux were out of sight.

"Der scare-Inchun iss der pitzness; he iss der stuffin's, you pedt! Oder I tidt nodt hadt him, I vouldt now be vearing mine scalb on an Inchun's lance bole."

He bobbed about in a hilarious two-step, with old Moloch for his partner.

When the baron had calmed down sufficiently to take stock of his position, he concluded that he had better get out of the open, lest the Indians, recovering from their fright, might still annex his scalp. So he burrowed into the bushes, lugging the effigy, and came out on top of one of the bluffs, where he had a fair view of the great plains lying to the north.

The Sioux had not turned into the plains, but were following a ravine between the high bluffs, so he did not at once see them. But, maintaining his place, he after a while caught sight of them, as they rode out into the open ground.

"Sdill hitting idt oop," he said, speaking to Moloch. "Dhey are going home py der air line, mit a sdory dot vill sedt der oldt vimen to gossibing a-blenty. Der man vot made you, vor to scare Inchuns, he vos a chenius!"

Lugging the image, the baron descended the bluffs, on the north side, and made his way slowly into the trail left by the Sioux mustangs.

He had not progressed far in it when he was given another fright by seeing a small party ride out of the hills and come galloping toward him.

"Can I turn dot drick again?" he questioned, looking

to his revolver, while he shifted Moloch to the other arm. "Oof I tond't, I am sdill a deadt man!"

But the party that had come into view was Buffalo Bill's, and the baron was soon rehearsing to the scout his wonderful story.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PRISONERS OF THE SIOUX.

Jogging along on the back of an Indian pony, to which he had been lashed, old Nick Nomad came into touch with the Brandons.

Two war parties—that which had captured the borderman, and the one that had raked in the Brandons—had united, a few miles out from the village of the Buffalo Killer Sioux.

The warriors having the Brandons in charge were, many of them, in a state of tipsy intoxication, and still others were hardly able to stick to the backs of their mustangs.

As a result, the Brandons had been subjected to many indignities, and would have been killed, but for the intervention of the young chief in command—Red Hand.

The young chief's kindness was only apparent, however. He had but lately risen to power. This was his first raid. It had yielded whisky, plunder, and prisoners, and the prisoners he wanted kept alive, that he might exhibit them in the village, and give them up to torture there afterward.

Thereby he hoped to increase his power and become the chief in supreme command of the Buffalo Killer Sioux. At present he had a few rivals; but less than when the raiding started, as one had been killed by a fall from his horse. He now learned that another had fallen in the fight in which old Nomad was captured.

"Only the Black Chief remains, and that weakling, Blue Wolf. I can buy off Blue Wolf with a string of ponies, and the Black Chief—the door of death is opening for him! It is well."

So thought Red Hand, when, meeting the party that held Nomad, he heard the latest news.

As the prisoners were pushed to the center of the united bunch of warriors, they could talk to each other; and Nomad improved the opportunity.

"I ain't goin' ter say nothin' erbout whyever ye come out hyar," he declared; "fer people will make mistakes. I made one, when I tumbled inter the hands o' these hyar red devils. What I'm sayin' is—has yer seen, er heerd, anything o' Buffler?"



They told him what they knew—what they had received from the baron.

"Ef ther baron is still loose he'll connect up wi' some o' ther bunch, ye kin deepend on't," he said; "ther luck o' ther baron is thet continyul et is shore a phenomernon; though et sometimes seems ter go back on him, et don't. So I'm goin' ter bank on ther baron. And as long as Buffler an' Pawnee is free, out on ther world's big ranges, desp'ar ain't goin' ter git me."

Louise Brandon, in spite of the bravery of her male attire, was a very much frightened and teary-eyed young woman; yet she was trying to hold up bravely.

"Do you really think they can help us?" she asked.

"Does I think et? Why, miss, I know et."

"But there are so many Indians here; and we're being taken to the Indian village, where there must be ever so many more!"

A sly smile wrinkled the old borderman's face, for he remembered that the Indian village was the place they had been determined to visit.

"Thar'll be plenty of 'em," he admitted; "yit et don't keep me frum bankin' on Buffler an' them thet is with him."

Louise Brandon was even more frightened when the village of the Buffalo Killer Sioux was entered, which was the same day. Painted warriors and clamorous squaws gathered about the prisoners in a seemingly frenzied mob.

Here the prisoners were separated, and thrown into filthy lodges; while a big council was called, to decide what should be done with them.

Nomad knew, from what he had heard, that Red Hand would vote for their death. He also knew that the whisky brought from the cabin by the river would serve to inflame the braves—it had been already distributed; and his hopes of a favorable outcome came as near failing as ever in his life.

Understanding the talk of the Sioux, he was able to size up the situation pretty accurately.

The Black Chief had been hurt; the fall of a lodge pole in a recent storm had so injured him that he was expected to die; it had struck him on the head. Red Hand was now in control; and he was a rabid and violent young redskin, with a hatred of the white men so intense that he sought to bring on a war with them, believing, in his ignorance, that the Buffalo Killer Sioux were able to destroy all the white men on the border. Of the many thousands and millions beyond the border he knew nothing at all, except that

he had heard of them, and scorned them as weaklings. If he could force these Sioux into a war, and win, then he would be the great war chief; and his ambitious thoughts had never soared higher than that pinnacle.

Nomad listened to the booming of the drums summoning the braves to the great council; and he thought of the Brandons, with pity. He pitied them no less because they had been headstrong and foolish. They had refused to credit the savagery of the Buffalo Killer Sioux, just as the latter were now refusing to credit the power of the white men.

The old borderman was sad and heartsick—a condition that did not come to him often.

"'Tain't agoin' ter do ther young things any good to have pony soldiers come and sweep all these hyar dancin' redskins into the ole Missou', aifter they're dead. As fer me—waal, I'm old, and I has had my day; ever' dawg must have his day, an' I shore has had mine. So I reckon I kin stand et."

As the night came down, and he lay listening to the vociferous and half-drunken orators foaming in the council lodge, he thought over his past life, and the recollections took him far. Coming down to the recent past and the present, he recalled the fight he had put up, when the Sioux captured him; it had been a great fight, and the life of a Sioux chief had been ended in it. But that would make it all the worse for the old borderman, when the Sioux came to deal with him.

He recalled his adventures at the cabin, and wondered about the man, Morgan, whom he had met there. His experience made him know that Morgan was a murderous scoundrel and whisky trafficker. He had come near losing his life in that cabin.

"An' mebbys,," he thought, "'twould er been better fer me ef I had!"

He recalled how he had fallen asleep, fully dressed, on the little cot in the upstairs room; then had been suddenly awakened by the tipping of the cot, and a grinding sound, like the creaking of a winch.

On trying to leap from the cot he had been precipitated into the hole that had opened in the floor, and had gone down like a plummet, into the water of the river, under the overhang of the house.

He did not know then—what he was to learn later—that a murderous cross beam, armed with a scythe knife, usually lay in wait for the victim thus precipitated out of the bed; he thought the attempt had been made to drown him.



"Et would of done et, too, ef I hadn't been ther water dawg what I am," he reflected. "Yit they tells me drowndin' is a easy death, and I ain't goin' to have no easy one, ef I go under hyar. So mebbby my high an' toomulchus swimmin', when my nose come out er ther worter, war a vain an' foolish show. Anyhow, I know I swum like er mus'rat, and come out 'way down ther river, wetter'n a seal.

"Then, when I war congratulatin' myself, I found thet Sioux war close by me, an' I had ter vamose sudden; couldn't git back an' take ter ole Hide-rack. Wonder whar thet caballo is, anyhow, by now? Waal, et don't matter.

"I made er hustle, and got erway frum them Sioux, and got way out on ther plains, swinging er circle thet I thought might connect me up wi' Buffler; then fell, like er fool, right inter ther claws o' some more o' ther reds. But I put up a fight they're rememberin', before they got ther crimps on ter me.

"Waal, what's ther use o' thinkin'?—takes all sorts o' incerdents ter make up a lifetime; et plum' does!"

Fierce yells, that seemed to split the council lodge, told him that the sentiments of the rabid young chief who demanded the death of the prisoners met with high approval.

"Waugh! Let 'em howl!" he grumbled. "When ther pony soldiers come fer 'em they'll do another kind; yit it mebbysy won't do me no good, an' ther Brandons. I'm a heap sorry fer them Brandons."

## CHAPTER XII.

### HEROIC PARDS.

"That howling and the tom-tom hubbub has a sound that I don't like, Pard Bill."

The remark was from Pawnee.

Buffalo Bill and his three companions—Pawnee, the baron, and Little Cayuse—had approached the village of the Buffalo Killer Sioux in the night.

The hour was late; yet lodge fires were burning, the village seemed seething with excitement, while the yelling of half-intoxicated braves, the squabbling outcries of noisy squaws, and the deafening bark of Indian dogs made the darkness hideous.

"It proves one thing—that there are prisoners in the village," was the comment of the great scout; "and, from the light in that big lodge, I think that a council is being held, or has just ended. Of course, it concerned the prisoners."

Tired of riding, they had dismounted, and stood by their weary horses, the latter putting down their heads and snatching mouthfuls of grass.

"I know oof a sureness," said the baron, "dot der Prandons are brisoners."

"And from what we saw in that mirage we have every reason to believe," added Buffalo Bill, "that Nomad is. And there may be others."

"Vot iss to be dit?"

"If we knew where the prisoners are held," said Pawnee, "we might charge in and rescue them."

"Sioux kill um bimeby pronto," said the Piute, straining to look through the darkness; "you sabe heap big powwow mean kill um bimeby."

"It has that look, Cayuse," the scout admitted. "So I'm going to ask you to make a sneak in there and try to locate them. Of course, if the chance to get them away is good, do it; and we'll be right on deck to cover your retreat."

"But you want to be cautious," Pawnee warned. "Though a lot of those ki-yis seem to be howling drunk, if they have a chief who is on his job he'll have guards set who are sober, and some sober warriors for fighting, if he needs them. Old Black Chief, whoever he is, is said to be a mighty shrewd rascal. So you're to mind your P's and Q's."

"Ai. Me sabe."

The Piute dropped his rifle, tightened his belt, settled his flannel headband well down on his black hair, and slid away into the night.

While he was gone they squatted beside the animals, ate a few mouthfuls from their war bags, and talked, and let the animals graze.

Cayuse was gone the better part of an hour; then he reappeared in their midst as silently as he had departed.

"No can find," he said, in a tone of deep disgust. "Sioux brave all places same time. Ugh!"

"They're still a heap wide awake," said Pawnee, "and moving round; and you didn't dare risk trying to get close in?"

"Ai."

"Did you see the Black Chief?"

"No see um; hear talk Black Chief sick; mebbysy die pronto."

"That clears the fog a little. The Black Chief is said to have been always friendly to the white men; but if he is sick and about to die, that means that some subchief has taken control—some young blood, who is bent on raising Cain."



They talked it over, and still lingered.

"What else did you hear?" they asked the Piute.

"No can understand Sioux good; but make um prisoner die to-mor', me think."

"Yoost you listen," said the baron, burning for excitement and danger and an opportunity to distinguish himself; "yoost you listen py me, now. I vill take mine scare Inchun unt valk me righdt dot willage in, unt meppyso I can do somedings."

"You can get yourself killed, all right, Schnitz," said Pawnee.

"It iss my own riskiness."

"Pawnee is right," Buffalo Bill objected; "you would be killed; and perhaps block anything we might want to do. For, you see, they perhaps do not dream now that we are in the neighborhood."

"If they thought we were near," argued Pawnee, "they would have scouts out; and we have heard none."

"Vot you say?" said the reckless German. "Oof I am kilt, vhy idt iss me—unt idt iss nodt you."

"We couldn't afford to lose you, Schnitz," said Pawnee.

"We will go in," said the scout, looking at his prairie pard.

The baron jumped to his feet.

"Vot—all oof us?"

"Pawnee and I."

"Unt ve are to sday pehint, unt feel lonesome? Ach! dot iss a shame!"

"We'll be back before daylight; with the prisoners, if we can get them. You and Cayuse will stay right here. If we shouldn't return by daybreak, you had better retreat into the deep draw, about two miles back, and stay hid there until you hear from us."

"Oof you dit nodt come adt all?"

"We will be deadt, or prisoners, ourselves; then you can do whatever you like."

The baron did not rebel; he knew when it would do no good.

"Oof der dare iss fighdtig unt you needt us, yoost send oop some volf howling; unt ve vill be righdt away behint your pack. Vill you dake der scare Inchun? Idt mightdt be oof a usefulness."

They did not care to take it—not having Schnitzenhauser's strong belief in its power to frighten redskins.

Many of the Sioux were in a drunken stupor; others, tired out with dancing, yelling, and the excitement of the great council, had sunk into sleep; and the

lodge fires had smoldered to beds of dull coals, when the two noted scouts approached the village.

The pariah dogs were more to be feared than any guards; and for these animals they watched, crawling, with knife in hand, to be ready for them.

First circling the village, they looked for a lodge with a guard before it, thinking that would indicate where the prisoners were held. Not finding it, they ventured in, and crept carefully about, their blankets hooded about their heads and shoulders.

Seeing at last a larger lodge, they moved toward it.

In this lodge a light glowed dimly, like a candle.

When they were near it, still looking for a guard, they saw an Indian slip up to it, blanketed as they were, cast a quick look about, then slide inside.

Instantly the light in the lodge went out.

As the pards squirmed up to the entrance they heard a struggle and a gurgling sound, like that of a man choking.

Their thought was that one of the prisoners was in the lodge, and some cowardly brave had sneaked in, bent on killing the prisoner.

Buffalo Bill squirmed through the entrance; right behind him came Pawnee. The sounds of choking continuing, the scout crawled on. Locating the noise to a nicety, he launched himself at the stooping form he dimly beheld.

He landed on the back of an Indian. As the Indian went down, the scout's fingers sought his windpipe. He was aware that he had fallen on a cot of skins. The Indian's face being driven into it, the cry he tried to raise as the scout's fingers gouged at his throat was stifled.

Pawnee Bill came sliding to Buffalo Bill's assistance.

About this time Buffalo Bill became aware that two men were under him. He judged that the third man was the prisoner whom the Indian, as he believed, had been trying to kill.

"Got him?" Pawnee whispered hoarsely.

"Aye! I've got him. Get your lariat ready," was whispered back.

Pawnee loosed the lariat at his belt, and slid the noose through his fingers.

A moment or two later the furious but silent struggle had ended, the scout having choked the muscular savage into a state of unconsciousness.

"Tie him, Lillie," he panted, trying to suppress his heavy breathing, while still clinging to the senseless redskin; "he may be possuming, though I think not; you'd better run a line through his mouth."



Pawnee Bill's nimble fingers got to work, and they did a good job; in less than a minute more the Indian was "hog-tied" so that he could hardly have moved if he had possessed all his faculties.

"Find that light, and see if you can get it to going again; and watch the entrance."

"Right-o!"

Pawnee found a lamp of fat, with a twisted wick in it, and stuck a lighted match against the wick.

"Looks sort of reckless, necarnis."

"The light was burning a little while ago, when this sneak came in; he blew it out, when he began his murder work. Hold the light over here, and let's see who the prisoner is."

Great was their amazement when the light fell on the face of the man whom the Indian had choked. He was a black-bearded white man, whom they had never before seen.

"Deserted Jericho!" breathed Pawnee. "Know him, necarnis?"

"No."

"Well, this puts me up the tree!"

"I think I understand it."

"I know that I don't."

"Take a look at him; then put the light back, and watch the entrance. What do you say to the idea that this is the Black Chief, who was said to be sick and about to die? You can see that there is a wound on the top of his head."

Pawnee blew out a whistle of astonishment.

"But—he is a white man!"

"With a black beard! Notice that. That's enough to give him the name of the Black Chief. He's a renegade."

The scout glanced at the senseless Indian; then stooped and felt for the white man's pulse. The next moment he had out his liquor flask, and was pouring a few drops of whisky between the man's lips.

"If he is the Black Chief," Pawnee whispered, "why would a Sioux want to kill him?"

The scout looked at the senseless Sioux.

"See those head feathers—of a sort that would be worn by a chief? My guess is that this fellow is a young chief who wanted to get the old chief out of the way, so that he could reign, as you may say, in his stead. How does that strike you for a theory?"

Pawnee whisled again.

"Perhaps you're right. Anyhow, it looks it. He was certainly putting the old man on the road to the happy hunting ground, and hurrying him."

"And doing it stealthily. He came into the lodge stealthily, blew the lamp out, and tried to put out the lamp of the man here."

He trickled a few more drops of the fiery liquor between the white man's lips.

"Keep your eyes peeled," he warned; "it will be all night with us if we're caught in here, with two nearly dead chiefs on our hands."

Pawnee peered out.

"That's right, too, necarnis; we'd last about as long as a snowbank in August. All seems quiet out there; not a ki-yi near."

The white man began to stir feebly, and groaned.

"I'd like to have a talk with this fellow," said the scout.

"It would be mighty risky—in here. We might put out the light, though."

"And the fact that it was out might draw Indians, to see what that meant."

"You'll have to pass it up."

Buffalo Bill was not in the habit of passing anything up that he wanted to do.

"See if the coast is clear."

"Couldn't be clearer," Pawnee reported, after another look.

"If I can manhandle the ki-yi, do you think you can carry the old man?"

"What! Take them out of here?"

"Out to where the baron and Cayuse are."

"Wow! Say, that's a great idea! I think we can work it; anyhow, we can make the try. With two of their chiefs in our hands we ought to be in a position to demand the release of the prisoners, for the lives of the chiefs; that is, we could do it if we had a crowd to make a stand with, or had a backing of pony soldiers."

"We can try it with the crowd we've got."

Pawnee looked again, and reported that the coast was clear. Then he crawfished and blew out the fat lamp. A moment later, each with his heavy burden, they stole out of the big lodge and began to make their way through the darkness toward the open plains.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BUFFALO BILL'S THUNDERBOLT.

When the black-bearded white man came back to himself it was in a double sense.

The efforts of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee to restore him to consciousness had at last been rewarded. But



for some time after that he had remained in an apparent daze. From this he finally roused as with an effort.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"With some of Buffalo Bill's men," said Pawnee, at the moment bending over him.

The man looked at the stars.

"I'm not in a house, or a lodge!"

"Out in the open, close by the village of the Buffalo Killer Sioux. We've been guessing that you are the Black Chief. You were in a lodge there, and a young chief was choking you to death, when we came to your help; then we carried you out here. We brought the chief, too. We have been making him talk. He says his name is Red Hand, and that you are the Black Chief."

The white man did not at once answer. Instead, he looked at the sky again, as if trying to think, or fix his wandering thoughts.

"Say that again," he at length requested.

Pawnee Bill repeated it.

"What is your name?" said Pawnee.

"I'm trying to remember that. I think I have been sick, or hurt." His hand was lifted to his head. "Yes, I've been hurt."

"Red Hand says a lodge pole fell on you, in a storm. He claims he was not trying to choke you, but was trying to help you; and that he is your friend. Deliver me from such friends!"

Again the white man lay silent.

"Help me to sit up," the man requested. "Things are coming back to me, or else I have been dreaming."

They aided him to a sitting position, and propped him with blankets and saddles. He was also given a pull at the whisky flask.

"My name," he said, as if still trying to think, "is—Brandon."

"Hoop-a-la!" whispered Pawnee Bill. "I reckon you'll be mightily interested in some news we've got for you, then. But go on."

"Yes, my name is Brandon—Amos Brandon. I live in Ohio, and I've got a family there. Still, it's queer—for it seems to me that I am an Indian chief!"

"The Black Chief."

"That's it. But how did you know it?"

"We heard that. I spoke of it a moment ago."

"That I was the Black Chief?"

"We heard there was a Black Chief, and we heard that there was a man named Amos Brandon; and Red

Hand confessed. Let me see if I can't help your memory along a little. You feel a bit dazed—a bit hazy in your thoughts?"

"Yes, I do. I've been asleep a good while, or sick a good while."

"Amos Brandon," said Pawnee, "came out to the Sioux country, on his way to the Black Hills, in search of gold; and came with a man named Morgan."

"No; his name was Mason."

"The same man, though, I haven't a doubt; both came from Tannersville, Ohio."

"That's right."

"What happened after you and Mason got here?"

"I don't know. Yes, we quarreled, and we had a fight." He rubbed his head nervously. "That's—all I remember—about that."

"He struck you on the head?"

"He did; he hit me with an ax handle, while we were fighting. I remember seeing the ax handle."

"Where was this?"

"On the head."

"I mean the location?"

"Oh! On the Missouri River."

"Anything else?"

"The next thing I remember seems like a dream—and perhaps it was a dream; but I was in the river, and an Indian pulled me out of it."

He tossed nervously, and stared round, as old and dead memories came back, some hazily, others distinctly.

"Then I remember there was sickness—in the Indian village; and I doctored the Indians. The chief died, and others. And——"

"You became the Black Chief."

"Yes, that's it; they made me their chief, when their chief was dead. But that must have been a long time ago."

He stared into the face of Pawnee Bill.

"Tell me," he implored, "that you don't think I am crazy!"

"I don't think that you are."

"Then I have been crazy, or something like that; for I can remember some things, and then it seems as if a gap of years had dropped out. It seems to me right now as though I had waked up after being asleep for years. Of course, that can't be so."

"I've got a theory—about your case."

"I haven't sense enough to have even that."

"Let me lay it out to you."



"Go ahead. But I'm glad that you don't think I am crazy."

"I've got to hurry-hustle this theory to you; so if I talk fast and skip some of the points, it will have to go so. I think when you were hit on the head with the ax handle by Mason, he believed you were dead, and chucked you into the river, to feed the fishes. Perhaps the water revived you. Anyway, an Indian rescued you; and he no doubt took you to his village.

"There you recovered, but you didn't remember your past; you had forgot that you were Amos Brandon. You helped the Sioux when smallpox raged among them; and afterward, because of that, they made you their chief. Your beard and hair were black; and, as you had no name, they called you the Black Chief. And here you stayed."

"It's an interesting story."

"And I've no doubt it is every word true. It does me good to believe that it is. For, you see, Brandon, we were at first of the opinion that you were a renegade white man, who had herded here with the reds."

"It's a queer story!"

"You kept the Buffalo Killer Sioux at peace with the white men. Not long ago you were knocked on the head by a lodge pole, in a storm; and came near dying. But you didn't make a die of it fast enough to suit Red Hand, who wanted your position; so he thought he would hasten you along with a choking. We caught him at that; and he is our prisoner right here."

"I haven't seen him yet!"

They brought up Red Hand; but the light was poor, and the scouts did not care to use matches. Yet, when Red Hand spoke, the Black Chief knew him.

"You dog!" he cried, in Sioux. "Did you try to choke me to death?"

Red Hand denied it; he said he had been trying to help the Black Chief, when the white men rushed into the lodge and overpowered him.

"I think you are a lying dog!" said Brandon.

"That last blow on the head," said Pawnee, "was the hair of the dog that was needed to cure the bite; in other words, I think it undid what was accomplished by the blow of the ax handle. When you came to yourself here you were hazy, but you remembered that you were Amos Brandon, and did not at first recall that you were also the Black Chief."

"Yes, that's right."

"Now, I have another revelation—not a theory this time. You had a family, back in Ohio."

"A wife, and a boy and girl."

"Your boy and girl are here."

Brandon stared round.

"They are prisoners of the Buffalo Killer Sioux."

Brandon tried to get on his feet.

"Can that be so?"

"You wouldn't know them. Remember that it is years since you left home. They are now grown. They came out here searching for you, and fell into the hands of the Sioux; and they are now prisoners in the village near us."

"Is it near?"

"Not a mile away."

"I must go to them."

"That is what we intend you shall do—if you are strong enough; or as soon as you are strong enough."

"I must go to them now."

"Held with them is a white man, our pard, named Nick Nomad. We are as anxious for his release as you can be for the release of your children."

"I will have them released at once. My children here!"

"You are the Black Chief."

"I am the Black Chief. I remember it well now. And I am Amos Brandon."

"Red Hand has taken your place, and stirred up trouble along the border."

They pushed Red Hand forward again.

"You dog!" said Black Chief. "Is it so? And you—you tried to kill me!"

Red Hand denied it.

"I will have you whipped for this," said the Black Chief.

"It is a lie," said Red Hand; "all is a lie!"

"You did not choke me?"

"No."

"My children are not prisoners?"

"I do not know. Three white people are prisoners."

"One is my daughter, and one my son. You have seen them?"

"They are in the village."

"A great council was held this night, and we think that they are to be killed," said Pawnee.

Brandon again tried to rise.

"Set me on a pony," he begged; "I will go there at once!"

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee drew apart and conferred.

"Put the Black Chief in there, and it will be a thunderbolt," said Pawnee. "The Indians think he is sick,



or dying, in his lodge; but let them see him again, and they will obey him."

"I'll launch that thunderbolt," said the great scout.

They talked again with Brandon, and they forced answers from Red Hand. In the end, they understood the situation as well as if they had been in the village a year and had heard every word uttered that night in the council.

They made their plans. But they did not move until after daybreak. In the meantime, they stimulated Brandon with some of the contents of the whisky flask. Another thing that was even more stimulating was his desire to aid his son and daughter.

At daybreak drums began to boom again in the village. Then fires were seen leaping there. Loud yelling sounded, with Indian dancing and singing. And as the gray dawn spread across the plains, Buffalo Bill and his companions saw the prisoners brought out, and led before the village, to die.

Buffalo Bill launched his thunderbolt.

Though Brandon was weak and feverish, he sat sturdily erect on Hide-rack, Nomad's horse; and rode beside Buffalo Bill and Pawnee into the village, and up to the dancing redskins.

Red Hand had been left behind, in charge of the baron and Little Cayuse.

Old Nomad, roped to a log that was about to be dragged through one of the fires, yelped like a wolf when he beheld Buffalo Bill. Only the moment before he had been defying his captors and daring them to do their worst.

"Buffer and Pawnee!" he screamed. "They never failed me yit. Halleluyer! Glee-ory!"

The Black Chief drove Hide-rack into the midst of the Buffalo Killer Sioux grouped round the prisoners.

"What does it mean?" he shouted.

The Indians were amazed to see him with the white men. Some of Red Hand's friends had reported that he was still ill in his lodge; but here he was, and he had come in from the open plains!

They explained, as they clutched their weapons, and stared angrily at the white men with the Black Chief, that the prisoners had been taken in a fight, and were to be tortured.

Brandon looked at the prisoners. Then he could contain his feelings no longer. Sliding from the back of Hide-rack, he rushed to his son and daughter; then he begged for a knife, and began to cut their bonds.

The plans to torture and slay the prisoners came to a sudden end; for the Buffalo Killer Sioux were still loyal to the Black Chief.

Red Hand, brought into the village, "took a back seat." He denied again that he had tried to kill the Black Chief.

"Now, my children," said Brandon to the Sioux, "I am going away."

"Let the Black Chief stay," they implored; "so if the terrible sickness comes again—the sickness that kills—we will have the Black Chief here to stop it, and we shall live."

"I will come back to you," he promised.

But it was a promise that he was destined not to redeem very soon.

While Brandon and the scouts, with their friends, were still in the village, they heard a bit of news—the story of the death of the man who had called himself Morgan.

It seemed that when Morgan and the negro met the Sioux, who were on their way to the cabin to get more whisky, the Sioux slew him.

The negro, more crafty, saved his life by proclaiming his willingness to show them where the whisky was cached; they had found only a part of it.

And he had been on his way to the cabin with them for that purpose when he was seen galloping in their midst, by the Brandons and the baron. Not only had he shown a willingness, but he had pretended delight in it, and had laughed with them as if he felt pleased to accede to their wishes.

They had let him go, after he had shown them the whisky.

THE END.

"Buffalo Bill's Sioux Circus; or, Pawnee Bill, Prince of the Plains," is the title of the story in the next issue, No. 535. It is a story of unusually lively interest, and all through it there is the thrilling excitement of a three-cornered fight, between the Bills and their pards, a band of hostile Sioux warriors, and a party of desperate outlaws. It will be on sale at the news stands August 12th.



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